

The post-2015 Global Agenda – a role for local government

Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance

Issue 16/17: June 2015

<http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/cjlg>

Lucy Slack

Deputy Secretary-General
Commonwealth Local Government Forum



“World leaders have an unprecedented opportunity this year to shift the world onto a path of inclusive, sustainable, and resilient development” - Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator, January 2015.

Introduction

The Commonwealth Local Government Conference 2015 – *Local Government 2030: Achieving the Vision* is taking place at a crucial time of flux and change. The period of implementation for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is drawing to a close, and the global community has been and indeed, still is, actively debating what should replace them. Local government is working hard to ensure that the post-2015 global development agenda reflects the important role of local government in defining, implementing and monitoring the new targets. It is a unique opportunity for local government to make its voice heard, to promote the importance of localisation in the debate, and to position local government as a key partner in the implementation of the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Alongside the negotiations to agree the new Sustainable Development Goals, which will be agreed at the UN General Assembly in September 2015, a number of other inter-related international negotiation processes form part of the global development agenda. Namely the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 at the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, Sendai, Japan, March 2015 (United Nations 2015); the third International Conference on Financing for Development, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 13-16 July 2015; the efforts to agree a Universal Climate Change Agreement which will culminate in the the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP21, Paris 30 November-11 December 2015; and the Habitat III

© 2015 Lucy Slack. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported (CC BY 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

Citation: Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance 2015, 16: 4483, - <http://dx.doi.org/10.5130/cjlg.v0i0.4483>

process, which will take place in Quito, Ecuador, October 2016 to agree a New Urban Agenda. It is essential that the implementation of these processes are integrated.

Background: The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

In 2000 governments took an historic decision in agreeing eight goals to drive the global fight against poverty – the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The goals were simple and clear, ranging from *eradicating extreme poverty and hunger* and *achieving universal primary education*, to *ensuring environmental sustainability* and *developing a global partnership for development*, and they were accompanied by specific targets with a set of global indicators. At the time the Goals were developed there was little discussion around *how* they should be implemented and certainly few discussions around the role of local government in their delivery.

By 2010 it was clear that progress towards meeting the goals was uneven, and some of this was as a direct result of them being seen as a top-down exercise directed by national governments, despite many of the component services essential to meeting the targets, such as water provision, sanitation and primary health care being services shared between national and local governments, or indeed the sole responsibility of subnational/local governments and other local stakeholders. The 2010 UN Global Forum in Uganda highlighted this (UNCDF 2010), by stressing the importance of intergovernmental partnerships in meeting the targets, and the concept of localisation of global targets was born.

The Sustainable Development Goals

The MDG period comes to an end in 2015, and global focus has turned to assessing what has been achieved, and the significant challenges countries still face in tackling poverty and reducing inequality. Substantial progress has been made under the MDGs – since 2000 the proportion of people living in poverty has been halved, over two billion people have gained access to improved sources of drinking water and huge gains have been made in fighting communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria. However the gains are uneven; at the same time, 1.2 billion people globally still live in poverty, more than 2.5 billion people lack improved sanitation facilities and progress is slow in improving maternal mortality rates (United Nations, u. d.).

Twenty years after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, where countries adopted Agenda 21 – a blueprint to rethink economic growth, advance social equity and ensure environmental protection – the UN brought together governments, international institutions and major groups to agree on a range of measures to reduce poverty while promoting decent jobs, clean energy and a more sustainable and fair use of resources. The Rio+20 Conference in 2012 was seen as a chance to move away from business-

as-usual and to act to end poverty, address environmental destruction and build a bridge to the future. One of the main outcomes of Rio+20 was agreement by UN member States to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which would build on the Millennium Development Goals and converge with the post-2015 development agenda (United Nations 2012). It was agreed that the SDGs should be

action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities

The global debate on the post-2015 development agenda, which seeks to build on the achievements of the MDGs but also address some of the recognised limitations, is now well underway. Unlike in 2000 when it was essentially the preserve of governments; local government, civil society, the private sector and other national, regional and international stakeholders have been far more effective in mobilising and engaging in the process to define the SDGs and their role in the implementation of them. Local government has been very active in recognising how pivotal this process will be and has been proactive in ensuring that the voice of local government has been heard throughout. This started with the work of the High Level Panel set up to provide guidance to Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the UN, which included Dr Kadir Topbas, Mayor of Istanbul and President of United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) as a member, representing local government (United Nations 2012b).

The priorities for local government

Local government has been actively engaged throughout the process, coming together to strengthen its voice as the *Global Taskforce of Local Regional Governments for Post-2015 and Habitat III*. The Global Taskforce (GTF) brings together global organisations and networks of local government including United Cities and Local Governments, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, and ICLEI together with development partners such as UNDP and UN Habitat, to highlight and actively promote local government's role in the post-2015 global development agenda and beyond to Habitat III in 2016. There is also a Local Authorities Major Group in the working group negotiations at the UN which the GTF has been working closely with.

Local government has and continues to make a strong case for its role as an implementing partner of the SDGs to be fully recognised; to ensure that global and national targets can be set, delivered, and monitored locally. Not only are many of the key services essential to meeting the proposed SDGs delivered at the local level, but local governments are in the best position to ensure that the needs of local people are understood and met, and that the SDGs are locally owned, inclusive and “*leave no one behind*”. This was the strong message coming out of CLGF's conference on Developmental Local

Government and its consultation on the SDGs, Kampala, May 2013 and has been reflected in subsequent texts in the context of implementation, including in *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet, Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General On the Post-2015 Agenda, New York, December 2014*, through reference to implementation “by all levels of government” (United Nations 2014c).

The local government community, through the Global Taskforce has also worked with a range of other partners to highlight the impact of rapid urbanisation on development and to call specifically for a goal which focuses on the need for inclusive, safe and sustainable cities and human settlements. Cities are widely recognised to be the engines of growth critical to development, but at the same time they are often home to widespread poverty and face huge governance, service delivery and infrastructure challenges. Their rapid population growth also impacts significantly on human settlements in rural and peri-urban areas. An “urban goal” (Goal 11) reflecting this territorially-based challenge in all human settlements is currently one of the draft SDGs reflecting the increasing emphasis globally on the impact of rapid urbanisation on the lives of the urban poor and disadvantaged.

CLGF has played a key role in the post-2015 process. It has contributed actively to the advocacy and policy debates at all levels, including through its engagement with DeLOG (Decentralisation and Local Government Network of development partners). Its advocacy has consistently focused on strengthening local government as an actor in development and this has been reflected in key policy commitments over a number of years including: The Aberdeen Agenda-Commonwealth principles on good practice for local democracy and good governance (CLGF 2005), The Cardiff Consensus on Local Economic Development (CLGF 2011) and the Munyonyo Statement (CLGF 2013).

Additionally CLGF has worked to ensure that its members are aware of and have been able to participate in the consultations around the SDGs and the potential role for local government in their implementation. CLGF has been successful in regularly securing endorsement for its work by Commonwealth Heads of Government when they meet at their biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) and continues to work with the Commonwealth Secretariat to further strengthen the voice of its members in dialogue around the SDGs, including the commitment for their implementation by “all levels of government”.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

There are currently 17 draft Sustainable Development Goals with 169 proposed targets and 304 proposed indicators to measure impact (United Nations, 2014a). These will remain draft until the UN

General Assembly in September at which it is expected the Goals will be adopted. The discussions around the means of implementation will require further debate and be agreed at a later date

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

It is evident that many of the draft SDGs relate directly to local government and local governance, and will require the involvement of local government in their implementation - water, sanitation, food security, sustainable use of resources, investment in infrastructure, economic growth and development all have a local delivery dimension. Similarly those with a strong governance and democracy focus, including gender equality and empower women and girls, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, and the cities and human settlements goal require action not just at the national level but also locally.

In recognition of this, the Global Taskforce and local government partners across the globe have also participated actively in national, regional and international consultations around what localisation of the SDGs will mean for local government. The concept is widely recognised, but the momentum

needs to be maintained and it is important that efforts continue to be made to ensure that there are delegations at the General Assembly, and in subsequent negotiations around the means of implementation, which speak positively in favour of ensuring the localisation of the SDGs. This is part of a bigger debate about the role of local government in development and effective multi-level governance; the *Busan Partnership for Effective Development*, 2011 recognised local government as a partner in development, and the European Commission's *Communication on Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes*, emphasises local government's role and seeks to strengthen it to address global development challenges.

Localisation of resources

It is also critical that the debate around the SDGs and their implementation at the local level takes into account the importance of ensuring access to the necessary resources and capacity to ensure that local government can deliver effectively. The Board of CLGF highlighted this at their meeting in Abuja, June 2014 (CLGF 2014).

The message was reinforced through the *Chisinau Outcome Statement on Strengthening Capacities and Building Effective Institutions for the Implementation of the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda, 25-26 February 2015* (The World We Want, 2015) which acknowledged the role of local government 'Local authorities and their associations must be empowered through capacity strengthening and enhanced institutional effectiveness to own and achieve development goals, stimulating community involvement and participation in local development strategies' (Article 2 viii) and the need to 'stress the importance of establishing suitable financing mechanisms to support the strengthening of capacities and building effective institutions at all levels, including through the localization of resources alongside localizing the SDGs, and recommend this issue to be considered at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in July 2015 in Addis Ababa.' (Article 14).

Subsequently and in the recommendations made by the Global Task Force (2015a) on the occasion of the hearings with civil society and the business sector organized by the United Nations General Assembly as part of the preparation of the third International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD3), in New York in April 2015, which emphasised the need for implementation of commitments to fiscal decentralisation; opening up access to own-source revenue and financing instruments at the local level; encouraging access to borrowing and long term investments, including through PPPs; and enabling local governments to directly access international development funds (Global Taskforce 2015b).

Next steps for the SDGs

The General Assembly in September 2015 is expected to adopt the 17 draft Sustainable Development Goals and to make a political declaration. The current zero draft of the declaration does not make direct reference to local government, and the Global Taskforce, CLGF and other stakeholders are keen to urge their membership to lobby actively to secure a reference to the role of local government within the declaration. Once the Goals are adopted there will be a further dialogue and agreement on the means of implementation. Some countries believe that the outcomes of the third International Conference on Financing for Development, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 13-16 July 2015 would be sufficient to cover the means of implementation, although other countries would prefer to see a broader document. The current zero draft of the Addis Statement makes some reference to local government (Para 31), but is quite limited and every effort is needed to ensure that it is retained.

Local government 2030: achieving the vision

Across the Commonwealth, countries are experimenting with different governance arrangements. There remains a trend towards decentralisation and empowering local people to play a more active role in local planning and decision making through establishment of systems of democratic local government. However, there is some evidence of re-centralisation in the Commonwealth; and commitment to genuine implementation of decentralisation remains a challenge in many countries for a variety of reasons, ranging from lack of political will, weak financial decentralisation, and lack of delivery and management capacity and resources.

Governments and local governments are also striving to become more developmental in their approach, in an effort to reduce inequalities and to lift their populations out of poverty. CLGF's conference in 2013 focused on the role of developmental local government and the role it can play in transforming the lives of citizens by engaging not just in service delivery, but through enabling and supporting economic growth and participatory long term planning and delivery for development. This shift is evident in many Commonwealth countries and will be inextricably linked to the successful localisation of the SDGs.

In an increasingly inter-connected world, with global trade and the impact of natural disasters and climate change making national borders less relevant, local governments are under greater pressure to respond at a local level to challenges and opportunities which they cannot directly control. Better educated local populations, and active civil society organisations have much higher expectations of their local governments, they are also increasingly mobile in the search for jobs and economic opportunity both within their country and across countries, providing

greater pressures on the policy-makers and service deliverers to respond to changing and persistent needs on the ground.

The impact of these changes is seen most clearly in the cities across the Commonwealth, including in its many small states. The impact of rapid urbanisation means that 65% of the global population will be living in cities by 2050. The urban population in the Commonwealth currently stands at 38% although levels of urbanization vary significantly from country to country. The speed of urban growth in small states, and the numerous secondary cities, must not be overlooked. Although their populations are smaller in real terms, the impact is often even more marked. Rapid urbanisation results in a complex set of democracy, governance and management challenges ranging from poor and unplanned informal settlements, limited infrastructure capacity, lack of housing, poor security and lack of public transport - all key issues which have been encapsulated in SDG 11, which seeks to recognise the unique challenges of urbanisation with a set of dedicated targets to support cities and human settlements.

It is against this backdrop that Commonwealth member states are asking themselves what kind of governments they need to respond effectively to the challenges they will face in 2030, and CLGF and its members are debating the kind of local government is needed, and what changes are required in terms of conceptual thinking, policies, resourcing and implementation capacity, to ensure that local government has the power, capacity and authority to deliver effectively and fully respond to local needs and priorities, contributing to the delivery of national development plans and in achieving the SDGs through effective implementation at a local level.

References

- CLGF (2014) Abuja Declaration on local democracy and development in the Commonwealth
www.clgf.org.uk/userfiles/1/file/Resources/Statements/2014-Abuja-Declaration-on-local-democracy-and-development-in-the-commonwealth.pdf
- CLGF (2013) Munyonyo statement on Local government's role in the post-2015 development agenda
[www.clgf.org.uk/userfiles/1/file/2013 Munyonyo statement\(1\).pdf](http://www.clgf.org.uk/userfiles/1/file/2013%20Munyonyo%20statement(1).pdf)
- CLGF (2011) Cardiff Consensus on Local Economic Development [www.clgf.org.uk/userfiles/1/files/Cardiff consensus 2011 final.pdf](http://www.clgf.org.uk/userfiles/1/files/Cardiff%20consensus%202011%20final.pdf)
- CLGF (2005) Aberdeen Agenda-Commonwealth principles on good practice for local democracy and good governance www.clgf.org.uk/aberdeen-agenda
- European Commission (2013) *Communication on Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes*
https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-local-authorities-in-partner-countries-com2013280-20130515_en_4.pdf
- Global Taskforce (2015) Local authorities at UN hearings in run-up to Post-2015 Summit
www.gtf2016.org/#!/Local-authorities-at-UN-hearings-in-runup-to-Post2015-Summit/cjtl/556899ec0cf2487417676974
- Global Task Force (2015a) Financing Urban and Local Development: the Missing Link in Sustainable

Development Finance www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/financing_urban_and_local_development.pdf

OECD (2011) The Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation
www.oecd.org/development/effectiveness/busanpartnership.htm

The World We Want (2015) Chisinau Outcome Statement on Strengthening Capacities and Building Effective Institutions for the Implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda
www.worldwewant2015.org/node/481165

UNCDF 2010 Global Forum on Local Development Report www.unCDF.org/gfld

United Nations (2015) Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030
www.wcdrr.org/uploads/Sendai_Framework_for_Disaster_Risk_Reduction_2015-2030.pdf

United Nations (2014a) Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal>

United Nations (2014b) Decisions by Topic: Sustainable development goals
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1481>

United Nations (2014c) Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Agenda
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/post2015/synthesisreport>

United Nations (2012a) Conference on sustainable development www.unCSD2012.org

United Nations (2012b) The Secretary-General's high-level panel of eminent persons on the post-2015 development agenda www.un.org/sg/management/hlppost2015.shtml

United Nations (u. d.) Millennium Development Goals www.un.org/millenniumgoals Accessed 12 February 2015