



Local Authorities Acting Globally for Sustainable Development

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Policy Debates

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Local Authorities Acting Globally for Sustainable Development

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GRAUTE U. Local authorities acting globally for sustainable development, *Regional Studies*. Member states adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 and aimed to adopt a New Urban Agenda during Habitat III in 2016. Related intergovernmental processes aim for a substantial benefit to impact sustainable development at the local level. Despite the high relevance of both processes for local development, local authorities and other Major Groups of stakeholders will only act as observers. This paper analyses why the United Nations acknowledges the relevance of cities while not changing the observer status. The paper claims that the approach may have a negative impact on the realization of objectives. It is suggested to strengthen further the voice of local authorities to increase the problem-solving capacity of multilevel governance of the SDG implementation.

Local authorities Urban development Sustainable development Multilevel governance United Nations

GRAUTE U. 地方政府为了可持续发展的全球运作, 区域研究。2015年, 会员国采取了十七项可持续发展目标(SDGs), 并致力于2016年的第三届人类住居大会(Habitat III)中采取一项新城市议程。相关的跨政府进程之目标, 则在于追求实质的效益, 以影响地方层级的可持续发展。儘管两造进程皆与地方发展高度相关, 但地方政府和其他主要利害团体, 将尽以观察者的身分进行参与。本文分析为何联合国虽然认识到城市的相关性, 但却未改变观察者的身份。本文主张, 此般方式或许会对目标的达成带来负面的影响。本文建议进一步强化地方政府的声, 以增加SDG实施的多重层级治理之问题解决能力。

地方政府 城市发展 可持续发展 多重层级治理 联合国

GRAUTE U. Agir globalement en faveur du développement durable: le rôle des administrations locales, *Regional Studies*. En 2015, les pays-membres ont adopté 17 objectifs en faveur du développement durable (Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs) et visent à adopter un nouveau programme des villes (New Urban Agenda) sous l'égide de la conférence Habitat III prévue en 2016. Des processus intergouvernementaux y associés envisagent des bénéfices substantiels qui auront un impact sur le développement durable à l'échelle locale. Malgré la grande pertinence des deux processus pour ce qui est du développement local, les administrations locales et d'autres grands groupes de parties prenantes n'agiront qu'à titre d'observateurs. Cet article analyse pourquoi les Nations unies reconnaissent la pertinence des grandes villes sans remplacer le statut d'observateur. L'article prétend que l'approche pourrait avoir un impact négatif sur la réalisation des objectifs. On suppose qu'il faut renforcer la voix des administrations locales afin d'augmenter la capacité à trouver des solutions de la gouvernance multiniveaux quant à la mise en oeuvre des SDG.

Administrations locales Développement urbain Développement durable Gouvernance multiniveaux Nations unies

GRAUTE U. Global agierende Gemeinden für nachhaltige Entwicklung, *Regional Studies*. Im Jahr 2015 verabschiedeten die Mitgliedstaaten 17 nachhaltige Entwicklungsziele und vereinbarten für die Habitat III von 2016 das Ziel einer neuen Stadtagenda. Mit den zugehörigen zwischenstaatlichen Prozessen wird das Ziel einer umfassenden Förderung der nachhaltigen Entwicklung auf lokaler Ebene verfolgt. Trotz der hohen Relevanz beider Prozesse für die lokale Entwicklung treten Gemeinden und andere

wichtige betroffene Gruppen nur als Beobachter auf. In diesem Beitrag wird untersucht, warum die Vereinten Nationen die Relevanz von Städten anerkennen, aber nicht den Beobachterstatus ändern. Es wird die These aufgestellt, dass sich der Ansatz negativ auf die Verwirklichung der Ziele auswirken kann. Zugleich wird vorgeschlagen, die Stimme der Gemeinden weiter zu stärken, um die Kapazität zur Problemlösung durch eine mehrstufige Politikgestaltung bei der Umsetzung der nachhaltigen Entwicklungsziele zu erhöhen.

Kommunalbehörden Stadtentwicklung Nachhaltige Entwicklung Mehrstufige Politikgestaltung Vereinte Nationen

GRAUTE U. Autoridades locales activas globalmente para un desarrollo sostenible, *Regional Studies*. En 2015 los Estados miembros adoptaron 17 objetivos de desarrollo sostenible (ODS) con la finalidad de crear un Nuevo Programa Urbano en la cumbre Habitat III en 2016. El objetivo de los procesos intergubernamentales relacionados es conseguir beneficios sustanciales que tengan un efecto en el desarrollo sostenible a nivel local. Pese a la alta relevancia de ambos procesos para el desarrollo local, las autoridades locales y otros grupos importantes de interés actuarán solo como observadores. En este artículo se analiza por qué Naciones Unidas reconoce la importancia de las ciudades, pero no cambia el carácter observador. En tal sentido, se manifiesta que este enfoque podría tener un impacto negativo en la realización de los objetivos. Asimismo se propone reforzar aún más la voz de las autoridades locales para aumentar la capacidad de resolver problemas mediante la gobernanza a varios niveles para la aplicación de los objetivos de desarrollo sostenible.

Autoridades locales Desarrollo urbano Desarrollo sostenible Gobernanza a varios niveles Naciones Unidas

JEL classifications: H7, H77, H83, O21

INTRODUCTION

We live in a rapidly urbanizing world. In 1950, 30% of the world's population lived under urbanized conditions, which rose to 54% in 2014, and is projected to rise to 66% by 2050. Depending on the overall projection of population growth, this amounts to 6.3–7.4 billion urban inhabitants by 2050 (UNITED NATIONS, 2014a). The number of cities and metropolitan areas in the world is growing, and national governments and international organizations are adapting policies in response to these trends. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by member states of the United Nations (UN) in September 2015 are an outstanding example of such policies. The SDG 11 on resilient cities and most other goals cannot be achieved without being implemented at a local level. Despite these changes at the local level and in international policies, local authorities are not given a stronger voice in international deliberations and decision-making. Member states safeguard their exclusive rights in policy development and decision-making in international governmental organizations, while sub-national representatives, including those who gained their governmental mandate from general elections, do not even have the right to speak without prior permission. One may respond that this is no problem, because citizens and local authorities are represented through their national governments, for example, in international organizations, and that decision-making at the international level is already less complex and more efficient if limited to many member states, as in the case of the UN.

Social sciences provide a number of entry points to question the current rationale of policy-making by the UN, including the following:

- Rational choice theory identified perfect information as an ideal foundation for decision-making of the individual. In game theory, for example, an extensive-form game has perfect information if each player, when making any decision, is perfectly informed of all the events that have previously occurred (OSBORNE and RUBINSTEIN, 1994). Perfect information can be excluded in a setting where national governments decide on an agenda affecting the life of all citizens on earth within the next 15 years. Engaging more actors, especially from the local level, would not be a guarantee for perfect information, but it could reduce the risk of important knowledge and experience from the local level being overlooked at the international level.
- According to the actor-centred institutionalism by Fritz Scharpf and Renate Mayntz (SCHARPF, 1997), interactions within and between institutions are driven by individual actors (principals and agents). It is thus necessary to know all orientations, capacities, constellations and modes of interaction of actors in a given institutional setting and policy environment for being able to understand and interpret current and future actions. This again leads back to the subject of perfect information, but elaborates that the challenge is about not only technical information but also individual orientations, capacities and how people interact.
- When Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks developed the concept of multilevel governance, they expressed the idea that there are many interacting authority structures at work in the emergent global political economy (PIATTONI, 2009). In a similar way, Michael Zürn did not describe global governance as a level of governance, but as the overall system of different forms of steering at different levels

(MAYNTZ, 2008). Thus, sub-national, national and international governments are not isolated systems. Instead, they interact, and this interaction is the key to the functioning of the multilevel system. Therefore, local authorities are to be understood as part not only of the local but also of the global system of governance.

These concepts and approaches do not question that the division of tasks and responsibilities between policy levels and arenas has its advantages and can reduce complexity. Nonetheless, and considering the growing number of citizens and local authorities in the world, they provide sufficient ground to assume that the prevailing model of mostly indirect interaction between local and international levels through national governments is not appropriate to develop and implement ambitious longer-term and multi-stakeholder policies and programmes depending on local implementation, such as the SDG.

This paper aims at stimulating policy debate and research on the role of local authorities in global governance. With his book *If Mayors Ruled the World* (2013), BENJAMIN BARBER proved that the subject is interesting enough to generate a bestseller, but with his proposal for a global parliament of mayors rotating every six months, he also demonstrated that current ideas to give local authorities a stronger voice are at best starters for discussion and further research and development (BARBER, 2013). At the same time, local authorities do not wait. Instead, they get active and especially in case of climate change groups of mayors develop catalytic influence in global governance (ACUTO, 2013). It is due time to stimulate academic debate and research on the position of local authorities and other local actors in international governance, and this debate should begin with an analysis of what has happened.

LOCAL ACTORS KNOW THE LOCAL SITUATION BEST! THAT'S WHY THEY ARE NEEDED FOR GLOBAL POLICIES, TOO!

The slogan 'think globally, act locally' became popular in the 1970s. It urged people to consider the entire planet while taking action in their own local environment. The slogan was picked up and further developed at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992 (UN, 1993). Agenda 21, a principal outcome of the conference and an action plan to implement the Rio declaration, might be best known for its 5000 Local Agenda 21 initiatives which were launched around the world in the years following the conference. Nonetheless, Agenda 21 had a global partnership approach and encompassed all aspects of policy-making. It called to strengthen people's participation and responsibility at the local and other levels. The role of Major Groups of stakeholders including women, young people, indigenous

people, local authorities and academia should be enhanced so that all aspects of policy-making can benefit from the wealth of experience of local, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (UN, 1993, p. 171). Therefore, Agenda 21 was not limited to a call for local action, but also called for international engagement of local authorities and other stakeholders as part of the global partnership. The idea to engage local thinking, knowledge and experience in connection with intergovernmental processes persisted and local authorities, such as the Local Authorities Major Group (LAMG), are still one of the Major Groups of stakeholders. The UN website on sustainable development underscores (UN, 2015c):

The Major Groups, representing key sectors of society, help to channel the engagement of citizens, economic and social actors, and expert practitioners in the United Nations' intergovernmental processes with regard to sustainable development.

This statement also shows that the channelling may not be that easy in practice. For instance, the text is about *engagement*. This can be understood in merely technical terms, e.g., practical action to achieve SDG and contributions to its monitoring; however, it can also be understood in political terms, considering that intergovernmental processes are effectively political. It should also be noted that the Major Groups represent *key sectors of society*. In fact, there is not *the one global society* consisting of a specific number of groups that have appointed their representatives for global dialogues and negotiations. Representatives of Major Groups may represent an NGO or an NGO network, but they are not permitted to act on behalf of those considered members of such groups. Representatives of local authorities may, for example, represent their own city or an association of local authorities, but they do not have a mandate to represent all local authorities. Accordingly, they cannot make commitments on their behalf or be held accountable for the actions of local authorities. And those who are not active themselves or are represented by another institution are totally off the table. The accountability mechanisms existing at the international level of the UN consequently do not include cities on which a major part of the SDG implementation will rely – as described hereinafter.

UNITED NATIONS SEARCHING FOR A COMPREHENSIVE AND INTEGRATED POLICY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Agenda-setting as a perennial intergovernmental process

On 27 July 2012, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/66/288 (UN, 2012). The UN launched a multi-annual process aiming at a global agenda with a single set of universal SDGs (cf.

Table 1. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Number	Goal
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

Source: UNITED NATIONS (2015a).

Table 1) under the programmatic title ‘The Future We Want’ to come into effect on 1 January 2016 and to be achieved by 2030. The agenda process itself was a combination of

- intergovernmental processes and bodies which requested support from experts
- contributions from the UN Secretariat and UN agencies, and
- global and national dialogues allowing stakeholders to raise their voice.

The UN summit on the Post-2015 Development Agenda in New York in September 2015, where SDGs have been adopted, marks the end of the agenda’s development and the beginning of its implementation.

Missing evaluations and a lack of data and information considered handicaps for the new agenda

The process to develop one new agenda as a follow-up to two other ongoing policies began with the reviewing of the achievements of the two parent policies. Firstly, there is the international cooperation on environmental policy, the Rio Process, signed at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992 (UN, 1993). Secondly, there is the process to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, which got their name from the Millennium Summit, where heads of state and government have agreed on eight universal development goals (UN, 2000). While the processes related to the Rio conference and the MDGs were launched in a favourable political environment, the current time is marked by

multiple crises. The UN Gap Report 2013 on the achievement of MDGs acknowledged that the political momentum for advancing international development cooperation seems to have waned (UN, 2013a, pp. iii, xi). Other institutions have come to similar conclusions (ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD), 2012; EUROPEAN UNION, 2013, p. 135).

The overview included a review of evaluation reports on MDG projects and programmes already finished, but with the MDG process continuing until the end of 2015, it could neither cover all projects and programmes nor was there time to wait for a thorough and independent evaluation of the entire MDG process. In addition, MDG are not the only activities having an impact development. Only an integrated evaluation could prove if, for example, the MDG to reduce extreme poverty (MDG1) was achieved in a country by MDG projects and programmes or by other policies, programmes and trends. Thus, the new agenda is drafted without knowing exactly which items on the old agenda have been achieved.

A similar observation applies to the Rio Process. For instance, while there is a review telling the story of Local Agenda 21 initiatives (INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES (ICLEI), 2012), there is no evaluation of the local initiatives in the context of their enabling environment and success or failure. There are still some very active Local Agenda 21 initiatives (e.g., in Dresden, Germany), but most others have disappeared. It is not clear whether they failed, were renamed or grew into something newer and better. The achievements of Agenda 21 framework programme projects and sub-programmes like the supportive Local Agenda 21 initiatives thus remain

unknown or unspecific and there is still a risk of repeating past mistakes in future.

Furthermore, there is a lack of data and information on the challenges and opportunities ahead. To understand a problem and to identify the best solution, it is necessary to have access to all relevant economic, social and environmental data. Information is a prerequisite, but in case of the interrelated 17 SDGs and their universal application, this prerequisite is not given and cannot be expected in the foreseeable future. Some of the indicators for the 17 SDGs and their 169 associated targets are quantitative, qualitative and some yet to be determined. Experts carried out preparatory studies, identified a number of the necessary monitoring indicators and used modelling techniques to combine economic, social and environmental data to allow better analyses and prognoses for sustainable development. Nonetheless, sources admit that structures, tools and methodologies to collect data are not yet sufficiently developed. While there are indicators and monitoring tools for many sector policies, the biggest challenge is the development of an integrated monitoring system. It is one thing to monitor economic, social and environmental trends, but another to monitor the impacts and interrelations of integrated policies (UN, 2013b; CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE INNOVATION (CIGI), 2012; MILLENNIUM INSTITUTE, 2013; SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS NETWORK (SDSN), 2015).

Stakeholder engagement as a necessary completion of the intergovernmental process on sustainable development

After the adoption of the MDGs in 2000, member states have been repeatedly criticized for developing such an important and far-reaching agenda without stakeholder involvement. Certainly, this was done differently in case of the new agenda and its SDGs. Following the review of parent policies, the second phase of the new agenda process focused on dialogues and intergovernmental negotiations on SDGs, as well as on their targets and financing. The preparatory process since 2012 was accompanied by a large number of national and international events, e-dialogues and relevant e-consultations. UN country teams supported 88 national dialogues and with its web portal ‘The World We Want’ (see www.worldwewant2015.org) the UN ‘enables people to engage, visualize and analyse people’s voices on sustainable development’.

Numerous experts and stakeholders were invited to contribute to conferences, hearings and expert groups or workshops on agenda-related subjects organized by the UN, member states and non-state actors. The integration segment on sustainable urbanization of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which was held at the UN’s headquarters in New York, 27–29 May 2014 (UN, 2014c), is one

of the more innovative forms of dialogue. It was a joint session of ECOSOC members and stakeholders. In addition, non-state actors built their own networks and platforms for exchange-and-coordination of activities. Most notable among those engaged in the Post-2015 and the Habitat III process are the association of local governments for sustainability ICLEI and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). Once again there is no independent study on the impact of the different forms of stakeholder engagement.

Facing complexity of an agenda of 17 interrelated goals

Despite the high complexity of the two parent initiatives, member states concluded that the uncoordinated way in which the MDG process and Rio Process were implemented has prevented synergy effects although their subjects were mutually interrelated. Therefore, they decided to merge both processes and to develop one agenda for the post-2015 period. The merger is a remarkable acknowledgement by the UN and its member states that sustainable development requires an integrated approach and cannot be divided into individual sectors.

How to focus on immediate tasks (and thus to reduce the complexity of day-to-day life) without losing sight of the overall agenda and its universal goals remains a key question of the implementation of the agenda. The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) developed a guideline on the subject (RAMALINGAM and JONES, 2008, p. 1). It identified that while a variety of tools exist for dealing with complexity, they are usually used separately. In addition, the ODI identified major difficulties in connecting these approaches with mainstream ways of shaping policy and practice in development cooperation. The ODI guide is very useful for development managers to manoeuvre in complex settings, but it did not address the specific challenge of dynamic developments.

In spite of the commitment to face the complex challenge of SDGs, member states focused their attention on setting the political agenda including the development of monitoring indicators, while often disregarding the challenges of practical goal implementation and achievement on the ground. On the one hand, the UN reduced the complexity of agenda development at the global level by sidelining the challenges of SDG implementation. Furthermore, the risk that information, demand and contributions, as they are available at sub-national levels, are not properly reflected or not even noted during international negotiations is a clear disadvantage. Finally, keeping local actors on the sidelines or even outside the intergovernmental process may put the implementation and goal achievement at risk. For a better understanding of the contradictory behaviour of the UN it is necessary to analyse how the UN copes with diverging mandates and tasks.

THE CONTRADICTIONARY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN THE FIELD OF SUSTAINABLE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Divided by the principle of sovereignty of member states

The UN is known for its Charter, the General Assembly, the Security Council and ECOSOC, but in the end the value its member states and the public attribute to the UN depends on what are the organization's achievements and its local impacts within member states. In spite of this, the 70-year-old UN remains a traditional international organization in its basic structure, where decision-making is the sovereign right of national governments, which are then responsible for the implementation within their own countries.

As laid down in its Charter (UN, 2005), the organization is based on the principle of 'sovereign equality of all its Members' (Art. 2, 1). Paragraph 7 of Art. 2 reads as follows:

Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter.

Local and other authorities at a sub-national level are not members of intergovernmental bodies, and are only indirectly represented by their national government.

Committees of cities and regions or economic, social, cultural and environmental councils representing the voice of non-state actors, including local authorities, have been established by constitution or law within the European Union and the African Union, and a number of other countries. However, they do not exist at the global level. Intergovernmental bodies of the UN, including ECOSOC, are composed of national representatives.

Member states may and do ask the UN for ground support in their country, but intergovernmental bodies of the organization have to agree for a mandate to be issued. The UN and the respective member states then have to sign a Host Country Agreement (HCA). The conditions related with this procedure are laid down in Chapter IX of the UN Charter (UN, 2005).

While the UN has only faced minor changes of its charter over the past 70 years, the world has changed dramatically. Together with globalization, the number and intensity of interactions beyond national borders keeps growing, and so does the number of state and non-state actors. Meanwhile, there are uncounted trans-actions and forms of governance involving public and private stakeholders at all levels (AGNEW, 2009). As much as the understanding of AGNEW (2009) may reflect reality, the UN Charter is still based on the abstract state as the foundation of international cooperation, and the UN as an organization has to

cope with both the Charter and reality. Given an increasingly globalized world and growing interrelations and interdependencies between actors, constellations and policies, the UN is searching for more comprehensive answers to the complexity of the present day. Thus, it is increasingly important to interact directly with what the UN calls the Major Groups of non-state stakeholders. Therefore, the UN tries all kinds of tools and methodologies and opens dialogues with all stakeholders including local authorities – but only as long as it does not require a notable reform of the institution and procedures.

The growing relevance of cities in the world

One of the advantages of cities is their growing relative importance due to urbanization, population growth and the concentration of economic activities in urban environments (UN, 2014a, p. 13). While urbanization is a global trend, population growth and rapid urbanization mainly take place in developing countries. This adds to the pre-existing challenges, especially in least developed countries (LDC), where the institutional and regulatory framework is often weak and authorities struggle even to provide basic services. Certainly, conditions for urban and regional development are not the same everywhere and therefore problem-solving requires a sound knowledge of the specific context in each city and region. In spite of all these differences and given the economic size, population density, diversity and political relevance, cities with an innovative edge are hubs of development. Cities represent the transformative power necessary for development and for achieving the SDGs (UCLG, 2014). They also realize the need to look beyond the limits and to cooperate with partners at the national and international levels, as stated in the Buenos Aires Declaration of METROPOLIS (2015):

For this reason, cities and regions exchange knowledge and experience with other local and regional authorities and contribute to national and international dialogues. Looking at how other cities have solved a problem is a simple way of seeking advice, and helps to solve problems in one's own city. In other cases where there are no model solutions, exchange and cooperation can help to search jointly for solutions. [...] No city or region, however big or powerful, has the capacity to influence the global agenda on its own. Local authorities from different parts of the world need to build close alliances to be heard in global forums and to be able to influence international decision-making processes. This is why networks of cities and local governments are crucial in today's world.

Urban development and local governance as the key to agenda implementation

Some of the 17 SDGs (cf. Table 1), especially SDG 11, include direct linkages to urban development. In

addition, SDGs and targets relate to many subjects like soil erosion, desertification, reforestation, quality of drinking water, poverty eradication, empowering of girls, primary education, or energy efficiency in buildings, industry, agriculture and transport goals, and many related targets need to be localized. According to the GLOBAL TASKFORCE (2015), all SDGs have at least one target with a territorial dimension. Considering this, it is not surprising that the role of local authorities received high attention right from the beginning of the agenda process. At the 'Cities Leadership Day' in Rio de Janeiro on 21 June 2012, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said that 'The road to global sustainability runs through the world's cities and towns.' The first proposals of SDGs also gave special attention to cities also by the first proposals of SDGs. One of the proposals was presented by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013), which was co-chaired by UK Prime Minister David Cameron. Another proposal was developed by the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS NETWORK (SDSN) (2013a) together with Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the SDSN Secretariat. Both groups had a strong impact on the agenda's development.

Several voices called for a stronger consideration of local and particularly urban matters, as well as for a better involvement of local actors. This was done, for example, in the context of the Global Thematic Consultation on Governance and the Post-2015 Development Framework. This consultation was carried out between September 2012 and March 2013 in response to an increasing demand for an open and inclusive dialogue expressed by various actors, especially civil society. The stages for the consultation included the Internet and several meetings, including a global conference in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2013. Summarizing the consultation, the two co-organizing UN agencies, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), came to the following conclusion with regard to the coordination of policies and cooperation:

Coherence among policies within and across governance levels, including national ownership of an international framework, is imperative: A new global framework must be aligned with national policies, budgets, and local delivery. Without such vertical alignment, it is likely that a new framework will remain aspirational and unachievable.

(UNDP and OHCHR, 2013, point 3, p. 6)

Further on, the text was specified:

Strengthening local governments and local development is critical for ensuring empowerment, civic participation and better service delivery: Local-level indicators must be included in any future development framework, because local governments are the primary point of institutional contact for the majority of individuals. From service delivery to wider programmes for citizen empowerment and

civic participation, policies need to focus on individuals and communities rather than merely on geographic areas. (point 8, p. 7)

The HIGH-LEVEL PANEL (2013), which included only one urban representative (the president of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and mayor of the city of Istanbul) among its members, has chosen this view on local authorities: 'Local authorities form a vital bridge between national governments, communities and citizens and will have a critical role in a new global partnership' (p. 10). Following this, the report used more drastic words: 'Cities are where the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost' (p. 17).

Underscoring the relevance of local action while ignoring the necessary enabling environment for local agenda implementation

In spite of the strong arguments for a prominently positioned urban SDG, the reports quoted failed to make proposals on how better to engage local actors in more formalized cooperation at the international level. The report of the HIGH-LEVEL PANEL (2013) explicitly stated that 'it is beyond the scope of this report to propose options for the reform of the UN [...]' (p. 21). The SDSN report made no specific suggestions for the implementation of SDGs. Instead the SDGs aim at inspiring those working on the implementation to act within their respective responsibility (SACHS and JEREMIC, 2013; SDSN, 2013b).

In spite of backlashes, the discussion on the role of local authorities and other stakeholders had an impact on the governance structure of the new agenda. Already in September 2013, a High Level Political Forum (HLPF) was established following the General Assembly resolution A/RES/67/290. In the coming years, the forum will review the progress made and identify challenges ahead. Thus, the forum is the main platform of the UN monitoring and coordinating the agenda implementation towards sustainable development. It meets every year under the auspices of ECOSOC, and every four years under the auspices of the General Assembly. The resolution enhanced the engagement of stakeholders. Major groups and other stakeholders have been granted comprehensive participatory opportunities in the HLPF. According to paragraph 15 of the resolution, representatives of Major Groups and other relevant stakeholders shall be allowed to attend all official meetings of the forum while retaining the intergovernmental character of the HLPF. They will also be allowed to have access to all official information and documents, intervene in official meetings, submit documents and present written and oral contributions; make recommendations; and organize side events and round tables, in cooperation with member states and the Secretariat. In addition, the resolution encourages Major Groups and other stakeholders to establish autonomously and maintain

effective coordination mechanisms for participation in the HLPF.

It is certainly true that the Major Groups with their independent organizations and networks should establish and maintain their own coordination mechanisms, but the measures taken are not sufficient to unlock their full potential and to include them into the management and accountability mechanisms of SDG implementation. Saying that Major Groups and especially local authorities may (or may not) contribute to the work of the HLPF is as if the lead partner of the urban development project told the other partners that they may or may not join meetings in which the progress of the project is discussed. In this respect, the UN relies on its own system. The governments of the member states are expected to get involved and to coordinate all relevant stakeholders within the national context. What sounds like a measure to reduce complexity of interaction and cooperation does not consider reality, which is increasingly driven by interaction and collaboration beyond national borders. In the case of the SDGs, the traditional understanding of international relations as the cooperation of national governments confines the global partnership between UN and Major Groups to a mainly virtual interaction channelled through national governments. Thus, national governments have more responsibility and there could be the risk that SDG implementation in certain countries is curbed by weak capacities at the national level. In contrast, stakeholder engagement at all levels of the multilevel systems of governance would make it possible to share responsibility and unlock the full potential required to achieve the ambitious goals of the agenda.

GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS AS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The challenge of implementing SDGs with an unclear means of implementation

Following the analysis of the process leading to the Post-2015 Development Agenda, it remains difficult to outline the ideal enabling environment and procedures to implement the agenda and its SDGs. The lack of a thorough evaluation has prevented a discussion and the development of a new agenda based on a comprehensive understanding of all achievements and failures of the parent policies, the MDG and the Rio Process.

The ambivalent behaviour of the UN and non-state stakeholders can be compared with trying to have your cake and eat it. It is impossible to protect the sovereignty of member states represented by their national governments in international relations and to strengthen the role of non-state actors related to intergovernmental processes at the same time. The agenda process repeatedly demonstrated that the fear of member states of

losing control over the agenda and its implementation has prevented the transformation of ambitious visions as expressed at the beginning of the process into a result-oriented enabling environment.

The relationship between the UN and the Major Group of local authorities is a special case. Although local authorities in all UN member states are part of the governmental system, the UN categorizes them as one of the Major Groups of non-state actors. If cities build associations like UCLG, Metropolis or ICLEI, the organizations are not international governmental but international NGOs. The fact that the general public understands local authorities as part of the public service and that mayors – where they are elected by public vote – are their political representatives for all matters of local concern remains unchanged by this classification.

In line with the principle of subsidiarity, the UN and its member states argue that many problems of SDG implementation can be better solved at the national level and thus the international level should not interfere with national policies for urban development. Nonetheless, the UN is measured by the impact UN resolutions, programmes and projects generate in practice, i.e., in member states and on their territory. In the case of SDGs, many targets need to be localized. Unfortunately, the UN hesitates to express clearly that the governance and management of SDG implementation require an excellent exchange of information and intensive cooperation between all relevant actors, including local authorities.

While referring to the principle of subsidiarity as a positive element of the agenda process, analysis was not done properly. It was neither thoroughly analysed and discussed which kind of support for SDG implementation at the local level is needed from international and national institutions, nor whether local authorities and other Major Groups and stakeholders have been informed about commitments they need to make to support the global partnership and SDG achievement. The UN, member states and stakeholders have to catch up on this while performing the implementation process at the same time. Certainly, the HLPF might identify deficits later and recommend modifications of goals or the enabling environment to the General Assembly. Surely, member states can try to compensate everything that is not provided through the global partnership. In reality this means that many open questions have been postponed to the implementation period. Unfortunately, repairing an already ongoing process is usually more difficult and costly than providing appropriate means of implementation right from the start.

The way forward

A better understanding of the question about whether local authorities can afford not to act globally while

decisions which might impact their own city are made at the international level is one of the things required. Local authorities and other local actors should analyse on their own, or with support from advisers and academia, how international economic, environmental, social and other trends impact their urban development. It should be reviewed whether it is sufficient to limit cooperation of local authorities with international bodies to occasional encounters at international conferences and local field visits of international representatives.

In addition, research and practical exploration on how the voice of local authorities can be strengthened and how this could strengthen and not weaken international deliberations and decision-making are needed. Possible enabling policy environments, necessary institutional settings, actor constellations, and forms of deliberation and collaboration should be emphasized. The Post-2015 Development Agenda does not understand the 17 SDGs as 17 silos but as a web of goals and consequently requires integrated governance and management at all levels of the web. How can this be achieved? There is no master plan and since the SDGs are unprecedented, the experience of the past is only of limited value. It needs to be analysed and tested, for example, how institutions and their representatives can focus on their immediate tasks without losing sight of interrelations and interdependencies within the complex agenda. In addition, one needs a better understanding of institutional environments and individual capacities best suited to cope with related challenges and opportunities.

With respect to local actors, there are numerous open questions. For example, the level of commitment by local representatives to the implementation of the agenda is unclear, and it is also unknown what is needed to mobilize local authorities and to unlock the full potential of cities necessary to achieve the SDGs. There are many other open questions related to SDGs, their localizing, implementation, financing, monitoring and evaluation, and questions regarding the capacities and accountability of institutional and individual actors who already joined or are expected to join the global partnership.

Towards a more flexible execution of sovereignty by member states: a voice for sub-national representatives

In the European Union it is common that sub-national authorities (cities and regions) develop their own cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. They have developed their own relationships with European Union institutions and keep them relatively independent of the foreign office of their national governments. Most regions have a permanent office in Brussels that is separate from the permanent representation of their national government. The European model does not serve as concept for the UN. The

legal status and objectives of the European Union and the UN differ too widely, but the example demonstrates that sovereignty does not exclude the option of continued international cooperation of national and sub-national authorities. Indeed, other forms to execute sovereignty are also possible. AGNEW (2009, p. 9) describes sovereignty as being 'made out of the circulation of power among a range of actors at dispersed sites'. Translated into the context of SDGs this could mean that local authorities or their representative associations could be entitled to vote on matters of their concern at the international level. On other matters either they may have no say or they may act based on a consultative status with ECOSOC as 4045 non-state actors already had as of 1 September 2014 (UN, 2015b).

The option of a UN council of cities and regions

BARBER suggests in *If Mayors Ruled the World* (2013, ch. 12) that mayors should rule the world and that they should do this through a parliament of mayors. According to his proposal, this parliament would consist of 300 mayors who would be allowed to serve one term only. The parliament should meet around three times per year and each time in a different city. Its objective would be voluntary action and, accordingly, compliance would be voluntary. It seems that Barber ignored the reality of public offices and the work of large international bodies. A council with a rotating membership, no permanent seat and voluntary implementation seems unrealistic. It resembles more a parliamentary assembly with a consultative role than a parliament as a legislative body. Members of a parliament need to get to know each other, the procedures and politics of the institution before they can become effective in developing initiatives and vote. In addition, they need resources including qualified staff to support the drafting of proposals that, for example, put new decisions in relation to the existing legal and regulatory framework. Finally, the formal establishment of a new UN body would require a modification of the UN Charter and, for the time being, this is an unrealistic achievement.

Nonetheless, the establishment of a UN council or other body representing cities and regions should be further discussed. In the longer run, the establishment of a body channelling the voice of sub-national authorities and/or other Major Groups might allow multilevel communication and cooperation to be strengthened. It may lead to stronger commitments and accountability of local actors. Considering the high but not even exactly known number of cities in the world, there are certainly numerous challenges related to the legitimacy, organization and financing of such a body. If in this context governance networks are to contribute to public policy and service innovation, they must be meta-governed with this purpose in mind (SØRENSEN,

2014) and, in this respect, organizations like the UN need to develop further. Electronic media offer new opportunities for global dialogue and coordination, but they also pose challenges and at least until now they seem to be limited in their capacity to substitute face-to-face meetings. Stakeholder engagement and information and communication technology are both developing and it requires further research and development to generate effective and legitimate tools.

Local authorities and other non-state actors need to improve the coordination and representativeness of their global activities

Strengthening the role of local authorities and other stakeholders also depends on the way these groups organize and present themselves. Paragraph 16 of Resolution A/RES/67/290 of the UN General Assembly suggests that mayor groups and other relevant stakeholders should

autonomously establish and maintain effective coordination mechanisms for participation in the high-level political forum and for actions derived from that participation at the global, regional and national levels, in a way that ensures effective, broad and balanced participation by region and by type of organization.

Effective coordination is indeed missing. This paper refers to several associations of cities (ICLEI, UCLG, Metropolis), but in addition there are other independent networks with a general, thematic or regional focus (cf. ACUTO, 2013). None speaks on behalf of all cities, but the fact that they represent a group already gives them a greater weighting compared with individual cities. Nonetheless, while existing international networks of cities are indispensable to channel the voice of cities, their representativeness is still rather limited and should be further developed.

Habitat III and the New Urban Agenda as a chance to catch up with the unfinished work of the SDG process and as a risk to separate urban issues from the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Shortly after launching the process leading to the Post-2015 Development Agenda of the UN in 2012, in December of the same year member states agreed to convene the Third UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), aiming at the development and adoption of a New Urban Agenda for the world, in Quito, Ecuador, in October 2016. This conference and agenda comes on top of several major UN events: the launch of the Post-2015 Development Agenda with its SDGs in September 2015; the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in July 2015; and the UN Climate conference in Paris in December 2015. What they all have in common with respect to cities is, firstly, the intention to generate a high impact on local

development and, secondly, the principle of keeping local governments and other sub-national actors off the official negotiation table.

Although scheduled since 2012, the significant part of the preparation of the Habitat III conference is just beginning. It is not clear what will be included in the New Urban Agenda and how it relates to the SDG and other policy processes. A number of policy papers that will be discussed by policy units have been produced by UN agencies, but participation is only possible upon invitation by the UN. Unfortunately, member states failed to agree on the rules of accreditation for non-state actors at a preparatory conference (PrepCom2) in Nairobi, Kenya, in April 2015. It seems once again that a relevant number of member states are too concerned about the possible strengthening of stakeholders, including local authorities, to allow an easy agreement on their role at the Habitat III conference and during the drafting of the New Urban Agenda.

One year after the launch of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the Habitat III conference is, in principle, an excellent opportunity to continue analysis, dialogue and negotiations on a stronger role of local actors. The UN has to do its part and engage all stakeholders and these stakeholders including local authorities have to contribute by coordinating and expressing their voice.

Metropolis, the biggest association of metropolitan cities in the world, acted as an example by developing and adopting a declaration on Habitat III at its annual meeting in Buenos Aires, Brazil, in May 2015 (METROPOLIS, 2015). In addition, Metropolis, UCLG, ICLEI and other networks coordinate their work through collaboration in the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments for Post-2015 Agenda towards Habitat III. Other Major Groups are invited by UN-Habitat to cooperate in a Global Alliance of Partners. Nonetheless, considering the slow preparatory process and the limited engagement of Major Groups including local authorities and academia, it is already doubtful whether Habitat III will be able to give an example of a strengthened role and responsibility of Major Groups in October 2016. The New Urban Agenda could include provisions that help create a better framework for SDG implementation at the local level and a stronger role of local authorities. Nonetheless, cities should not wait for others to motivate them. Even without Habitat III and the New Urban Agenda, they would need to intensify cooperation with each other and to raise their voice in intergovernmental processes related to sustainable and urban development. Support from academia and other experts could help to develop knowledge and professionalism for their international engagement.

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