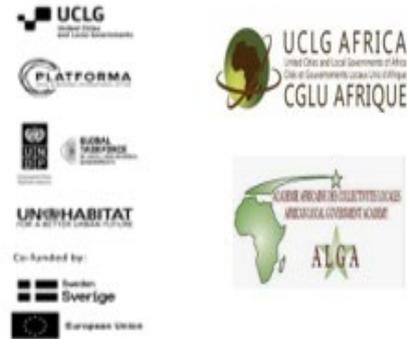


Mobilising Decentralised Cooperation to localise the SDGs in Africa



25 Jan 2022 Version 04

1. Introduction

There can be no doubt that the global agendas offer an important and exciting opportunity for local leadership to join the growing African municipal movement, and in particular for UCLG Africa to play a critical and cohesive and visible role in actively communicating, expressing challenges and constantly looking for new regional and international partnerships that help move the SDG agenda forward.

This emerging role for UCLG is to be seen against the backdrop of Africa clearly becoming the focus of international development cooperation. As decentralized cooperation is intrinsically part of development cooperation, one of the strategic thrusts required is the active building of capacity in African local government. As a point of departure, decentralised cooperation is no longer about transfer of funding and knowledge, or of the mere implementation of development projects alone. At the same time, it is no longer limited to European-African relations.

It is time for a new, dynamic and more nuanced understanding of decentralised cooperation in the African context, which embraces mutual learning between practitioners rooted in trust and respect and working collaboratively not just with local governments but with a range of territorial partners from local business, NGOs and CBOS to academia and research institutes each contributing based on their unique strengths. It is interesting that the call for by the UCLGA team for this redefining and more progressive understanding of DC is mirrored in the latest CIB 2021 policy paper *Decentralised Cooperation and Local Government: Addressing Contemporary Global Challenges* where DC is presented as multi-layered, multi-dimensional and responsive to 21 century challenges and opportunities.

This short article prepared on behalf of the UCLG and UCLGA learning teams provides a short snapshot view of the nature of DC on the African continent. Based on interviews with key players and drawing from online workshops with DC personnel and desktop material is presents an African perspective of the process of mobilising DC to localise the SDGs on the continent. It contextualises the municipal development challenges before presenting how DC can be seen as an important development lever. Three case studies are also included to give a sense of the type of DC projects that have been underway. Importantly, the article also begins to articulate key elements of the strategy underpinning how DC is to be rolled out moving ahead on the African continent.

2. Contextualising the development challenges in Africa

In its position paper on DC in Africa, the UCLGA (2021) identified the first critical challenge facing the continent as population growth and its corollary, the rapid urbanization of the continent, which they suggest contributes to an acceleration of large movements of populations from communities located in rural areas to communities located in urban areas; from countries and regions perceived as poor to countries and regions perceived as offering more opportunities, both within and outside the continent. By force of circumstance, they note that African local authorities therefore find themselves on the front line in the management of migration since most migrants leave a local authority to settle temporarily or permanently in another authority in the same country, on the same continent or outside the home continent. It is this new dimension of relations between communities they argue, that gives rise to numerous innovations in practices, the involvement of actors, and institutional arrangements, often without the institutional and legal frameworks having prepared them for it.

The second major challenge articulated by the UCLGA that African communities must take up is that of their contribution to the achievement of the African Union's Agenda 2063 which they argue calls for the structural transformation of the African continent in all areas to ensure its development and sustainability and sustainable integration. The free trade area of the African continent created in 2019 to accelerate the dynamics of African integration they note, will induce profound changes in the economic and business landscape. This will however require African LRGs to adjust their international action which will undoubtedly pay much more attention to the attractiveness of their territories, and to transforming the potential of their natural assets, their tangible and intangible heritage and their human capital in order to be able to better respond to the structural challenges that are for them, the employability of young people, the integration of women into economic and social life or gender equality. This call to give focus on the nature on international action and creating powerful territories, it is argued is a fundamentally important point to be noted, in the context of decentralised cooperation.

In addition to these challenges, there are questions of improving democratic governance, access to basic services, citizen participation, respect for human rights and diversity, bringing within the scope of decentralized cooperation and development of coordinated international action by LRGs in new and much more diverse fields. Having set the broader African developmental context it is also useful to obtain a snapshot view of the municipal challenges facing LRGS.

Accord (2019) in a detailed assessment of the municipal environment in Africa, offers a very useful framework for understanding the complex challenges facing cities and regions on the continent. It is contended that these challenges need to be in the foreground in any analysis of DC as they form the content around which collaborative partnerships need to be structured so that knowledge and expertise and technical learning processes can be mobilised to systematically address these municipal challenges.

Whilst acknowledging that generalisations across the regions cannot be made, given the specificities of local contexts, five broad areas have been identified by Accord. As indicated in Figure 1 below, and briefly summarised here again to help contextualise the municipal environment these challenges relate to and how DC can respond to these challenges in real and tangible ways.



Figure 1: Key Challenges facing local governments in Africa. Source: Accord Development Consultancy (2019).

1. Planning Policy and legislation

Many African municipalities have not invested in strategic and long-term planning that envisions and positions themselves in terms of their strategic advantage. Where such plans may exist, they are not grounded with implementation plans, budgets and capacity to execute, nor with effective and ongoing monitoring mechanisms to ensure planning outcomes are achieved. The sharing of visioning experiences between African cities (e.g., Durban, Johannesburg, Mzuzu, Blantyre, Otjiwarango, Maputo, etc.) have proved invaluable in inspiring African cities to learn from each other.

2. Municipal systems and procedures

A key challenge is the lack of data driven decision-making that is supported by municipal systems, which in themselves are often antiquated. Municipal procedures are also often not documented and the loss of institutional memory through staff turnover is accompanied by a loss of technical know-how. Many good case practices of building effective municipal systems and procedures can serve as points of reference for other African cities involved in peer learning DC partnerships.

3. Resource deficiency

Given the history of underdevelopment and colonisation, a related challenge for most African local governments is the lack of technical, human and financial resources. It is for this reason that many municipalities opt for DC projects that are defined by aid transfer from North to South. Whilst this is understandably justifiable, they come with their challenges and need to be carefully thought through.

4. Service delivery

At a fundamental level, it is this core business of the delivery of basic municipal services that many African municipalities still grapple with. Given the complex set of challenges outlined above, local governments are often unable to meet their economic, social and environmental mandates that enable their citizens to enjoy a better quality of life. It is here that technical expertise between cities and regions can be shared in direct DC projects that enable knowledge transfer.

5. Municipal governance

There is increasing appreciation for the role of “soft issues” related to governing complex municipal environments. The value of strong political and administrative leadership for example has been shown to make a real difference in cities and regions. Even in, or perhaps particularly in under-resourced contexts those in Africa, the ability to communicate and collaborate, to foster and nurture multi-stakeholder partnerships and to enable local community voices to be heard and to participate meaningfully in their own development is critical. Whilst some African cities have begun to build strong municipal governance traits, many still require support and will do well to partner with other cities that are further along in their governance journey.

As shown above, well-structured DC initiatives can be harnessed to mobilise resources, knowledge and expertise from partners to help deal with the myriad of challenges facing local governments in Africa. The way that the DC structured however needs to be well thought out. In the next section, the thinking around using DC as a powerful tool to help localise the SDGs on the continent is outlined.

3. Decentralised cooperation as enabler of the SDGs and Africa 2063

It is useful to note that 17 goals have local dimensions, with SDG 17 calling for a global cooperation and partnership to enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms. It is here that decentralized cooperation is not only the key enabler but also an effective lever for the localization process of the SDGs, given the skill gap in human capital and the limitations in terms of expertise, and finances. Critically, the changing context at the level of the African continent also calls for greater mobilization of LRGs to meet the challenges facing Africa.

As indicated earlier, this development gives rise to many innovations which place decentralized cooperation in a more strategic perspective. The international action and decentralized cooperation of African LRGs are encouraged to be oriented towards the promotion of more egalitarian cooperation relations and more long term. In addition, by basing these relationships on issues of universal scope such as the SDGs, climate change and the protection of biodiversity, the management of migration, the fight against poverty and inequalities, the promotion of human rights, and in establishing and anchoring them over time, decentralized cooperation and the international action of LRGs appear to be an essential lever and enabler for the establishment of international relations and multilateralism over time and as close as possible to the concerns, needs and priorities of the populations, which reinforces their impact on the improvement of their life and on their conviviality.

Decentralized cooperation and the international action of LRGs are all the more likely to be one of the best vehicles for bringing people together over time as these authorities have structured themselves by setting up the world organization of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) whose regional sections (including that for Africa, UCLG Africa) carry the representative voice of LRGs and authorities

in the various continental and international arenas. The multiplicity of areas of intervention of decentralized cooperation, the diversity of practices and contexts of intervention, the more or less strong integration of the different components of local societies in the initiatives and actions of decentralized cooperation justify that we draw the lessons from these practices to provide the means for a greater contribution of decentralized cooperation and international action by local authorities to the decade of action for the achievement of sustainable development objectives and African Union Agenda 2063.

4. A focus on practice: showcasing some African DC practices

The following three vignettes present interesting examples of decentralised cooperation on the continent. They draw on different DC modalities and methodologies that work best in this context.

(INSERT ARTWORK ON TYPOLOGIES FROM MODULE HERE)

French and Madagascan municipalities partner to sustain municipal finances

The port city of Mahajangar boasting the waterfront Corniche with palms and vibrant street food-stalls is an important international tourism destination in Madagascar. As a seaport this city of nearly 300 000 people is the second most important one in the country. Notwithstanding with strategic advantage, the city leadership team has been grappling with the challenge of optimising local taxation in order to ensure a more financially viable municipality and one with improved governance systems. In line with the spirit of SDG 17, a multi-stakeholder collaboration project was initiated with the city of Mulhouse in Eastern France together with a range of partners including the Syndicate of Electricity and Gas Rhine, the Interdepartmental Syndicate for the Sanitation of the Paris area, as well as the Syndicate of Water of Île-de-France.

Given the multiplicity of partners at various levels and the need to improve coordination between the stakeholders, a delegated cooperation process was adopted. Whilst the main interventions relied on technical cooperation through the sharing of knowledge skills and expertise this North-South DC project also included a component of aid funding. Through sustained and intense mutual support, the project was able to yield important results. In the first instance local finance and contract management was greatly improved in Mahajangar helping build the foundation for revenue enhancement. Secondly overall governance improvements with increase in citizen accountability was reported as a significant achievement.

Dakar-Marseille peer learning for more sustainable local tourism

When the Dakar city leadership were grappling with the challenge of integrated beach management the bold decision to learn from successful experiences from Marseille really paid dividends. Recognising the conflicts of beach use beyond bathing, and the need to boost local tourism by leveraging the latent, rich historical and cultural heritage of Dakar, a unique partnership was forged that brought together the International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF), the cities of Dakar and Marseille, the International and European Relations Department as well as project supporters Couveuse Interface and the Marseille Métropole Innovation Group. Working in the true spirit of SDG 17, a multi-stakeholder partnership was established to unlock and share the knowledge, expertise and financial resources to enable sustainable tourism in Dakar.

Particularly significant was the establishment of a business incubator designed to enable small businesses to develop and hone their entrepreneurial skills. Whilst localising SDG 8.3 through decent job creation and entrepreneurship the project also aligned with SDG 8.9 by actively promoting sustainable tourism by creating jobs and promotes local culture and heritage. This aspect of the valorization of all indigenous knowledge systems is an important and positive contribution to culture and heritage preservation. The project resulted in the discovery of the rich history of a number of buildings in Dakar that date back to the colonial era, and to bringing light to the history of a mythical park while uncovering the traditions of the fishermen's district of Soubédioune. The project also helped uncover more information of a typical Lebou neighbourhood and help craft an itinerary that would enhance both the sacred and historical sites. In addition, through the collaboration a process to identify ten buildings to install informative panels telling their stories was initiated.

Given the challenges of economic precariousness, the business incubator project intended to reduce unemployment, while at the same time helping to create and consolidate micro and small business. Investing in local craft support by hosting workshops for weavers and shoe makers, as well as women dyers and soap transformers were important aspects of the project. The hub enabled entrepreneurs to now enjoy extensive support for the establishment of their companies, with the enlistment of tutors, sponsors and advisors to ensure constant business supervision. Excited about the impacts of the program, the project team note that the production of tourism promotional videos for the purposes of garnering online support, the creation of promotional leaflets on tourist circuits, while fast tracking the appointment of a guide in close proximity to Dakar all count as important outputs. The project also facilitated the execution of several cultural events in various fields such as cinema, music, art, dance or traditional culture, and facilitated the installation of interpretation signage on historical buildings.

This direct cooperation project between the 2 cities from the North and South, supported by a range of divergent actors is a good example of the unlocking and mobilization of human, material and financial resources from local and international partners for local development.

Blantyre City reaches out to European and North American cities for educational and cultural partnerships

The Blantyre City Council boasts a long and rich history of interesting collaboration between itself and cities from the North. The partnership between itself and the City of Hannover in Germany for example dates back to 1968. This bilateral cooperation was inspired by a benchmarking tour to Hannover and other parts of Germany undertaken by a delegation of young Malawians.

This direct, vertical DC project comprised of two main goals. First, it was to cooperate in the area of cultural exchange and education, facilitating students from Blantyre to attend tertiary education in Hannover. Secondly, it was to undertake knowledge exchanges in areas of waste management, human development, city tourism and arts development.

In looking back at the impact of the cooperation, important results have been reported. In responding to SDG4's focus on education to promote a culture of peace and non-violence, an appreciation of cultural diversity, and of culture's contribution to sustainable development, a series of meaningful cultural exchange visits of artists from both cities have been facilitated successfully through performances and interactions. In addition, 10 Malawian students granted the opportunity to pursue various courses in divergent fields at tertiary level in Hannover, with some enjoying learning visits to Blantyre through internship programmes. Importantly, and as a result of aid funding, a vocational school was established in Blantyre with the support of Hannover City.

The North- South DC partnership in Blantyre also extended beyond Europe to North America. Recognising the inherent value of investment in education, Dr Ntika a Malawian national residing in the city of Norfolk in Nebraska initiated a partnership aimed at supporting the establishment of a school based on the American syllabus in Blantyre, Malawi in 2016. This interesting North-South direct DC project had a two-pronged focus of improving education and of facilitating cultural exchange between the two cities.

The project enabled 10 Malawian students to enjoy tertiary education in Norfolk City. More importantly the dream of establishing a sister school in Blantyre was realised enabled by strong political leadership from both Mayors who even took the time to attend the graduation ceremonies. This case study and that of Hannover is interesting and important as it demonstrates the role and value of short-term financial aid from the North. It reveals how aid can be mobilised in ways that can help promote more sustainable outcomes such as investment in education in development economies, helping realise SDG 4 by ensuring "inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all". At the same time too, the case also highlights the limits to aid as the continued financial support from both Hannover and Norfolk City was not possible, and with limited funding from Blantyre exchange visits could not be sustained.

5. Building technical capacity to rollout SDG-linked DC

One of the more sustainable ways to embed the value of SDG-linked decentralisation cooperation is through intensive capacity building of LRG practitioners. Recognising the power of building a regional cadre of DC ambassadors, the UCLGA supported by the African Local Government Academy (ALGA) partnered with the UCLG Learning Team to run an online training program tailored for the region. Aimed at equipping potential trainers with the knowledge to run their own training sessions, a four-day intensive program developed by the UCLG, Platforma, United Nations Development Programme and UN Habitat was run during June /July and repeated for French-speaking practitioners in September 2021.



This hands-on interactive training used a blended-learning methodology to cover the content of a training module that was released to all trainers. Equipped with an understanding of the history of decentralized cooperation and its relations with the principles of the SDGs, trainers were empowered

Figure 2: Excerpt from interactive online training

with appreciating the value of new possibilities of partnerships, resources and funding and how to design SDG-linked projects and policies.

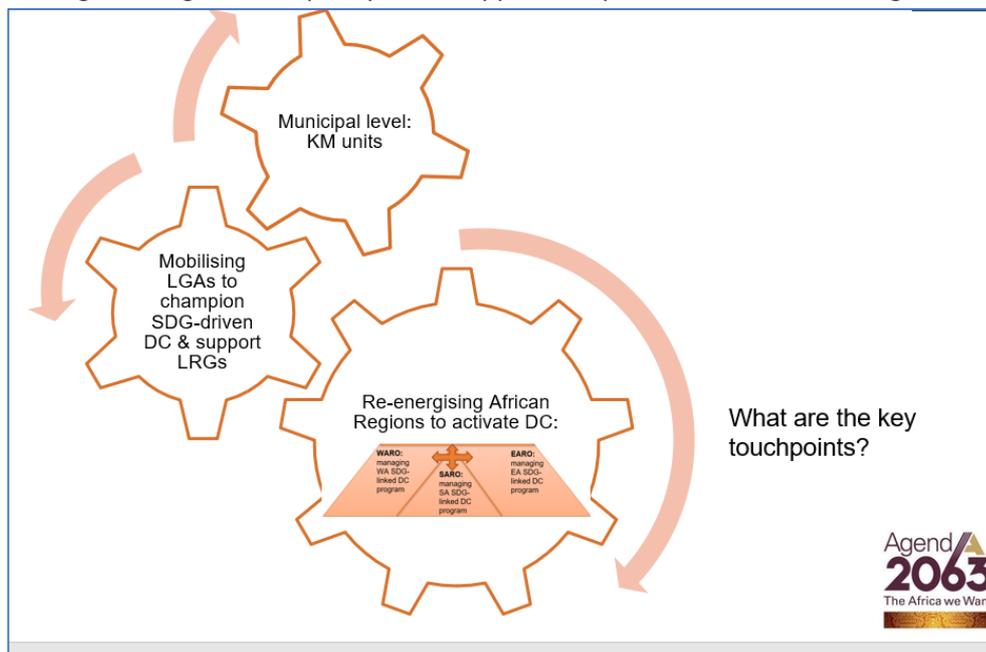
The experiential learning component focussing on real life case studies drew on lessons from the cultural exchange and education in Blantyre (Malawi); to sanitation and environment competitions in the Lake Victoria Region and insights from the public space heritage South-South exchange between Rabat & Dakar. Participants also reflected on the National Association of Mozambican Municipality (ANAMM)'s experience of south-south cooperation in Mozambique revealing the inherent value of learning from southern partners grappling similar challenges in similar development contexts. In learning about the eThekweni Municipality's model of developing a DC policy there was interesting discussion and consensus reached that DC policy development has been neglected within Africa. This was earmarked as a priority and the training offered simple steps for practitioners to begin drafting simple but effective policy guidelines for DC programs.

6. Strategic next steps for action

One of the important outcomes of the training session was the opportunity created for the leadership team from UCLG/UCLGA and ALGA to reflect on the approach to DC in Africa and to craft a strategic action plan to help embed SDGs in the DC process. In summary, these are the high-level actions that emerged from the workshop:

FOR UCLG AFRICA

- To promote a new understanding and mindset of DC that is more developmental and prioritises south-south and triangular cooperation in a spirit of mutual learning
- To support a bottom-up capacitation program starting at the municipal level by building local Knowledge Management capacity to be supported by LG Associations at a regional level



- To utilise the momentum created by the training to catalyse immediate action led by champions in the selected 8 countries of Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique, Botswana, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya and Zambia.
 - The trainers' community will have support in their endeavours to train more focal point and facilitators in associations and cities
 - Joint training will be measured with peer learning and networking projects can be promoted and included on demand
- To urgently build the capacity of the UCLG Africa through ALGA in order for it to strategically support the geographic regions on the continent
- To support these regions to develop regional learning frameworks, commencing with country assessments of capacity at LGA and municipal level to roll-out SDG-linked DC
- To establish a simple but effective Monitoring and Evaluation system to ensure that the program is on track and continually monitored.
- To implement a communication system that ensures all regional role players are in the loop
- To devise creative mechanisms to ensure that political leadership are engaged as champions for SDG-linked DC in Africa.
- To enrich the UCLG Africa e-Academy platform by integrating all useful content on DC (videos, Moocs, etc.)
- Amplify the UCLG AFRICA knowledge hub with section focussed on DC cases

FOR UCLG

- To actively promote the good practices from Africa internationally as part of their knowledge management mandate in order to inspire and help improve the design of programs
- To work collaboratively with Platforma to support the methodologies and link and promote the practices once they are reported