
Municipal International Cooperation

The Role of
Local Government
in Decentralised
Development Cooperation

The International Union of Local Authorities (IULA)
Working since 1913 to promote democratic local self-government worldwide



Promoting Municipal International Cooperation

An IULA Policy Paper on Local Government's Role in Decentralised Development Cooperation

1 The Context

- 1.1 At a time when dissatisfaction with centralised, unproductive and undemocratic institutions has been steadily spreading in all regions of the world, decentralisation offers real opportunities for positive change. Public sector reform and economic structural adjustment programmes are proliferating. Decentralisation is being seen as a way to strengthen the public sector in an era of globalization and fiscal constraint. It is focussing attention on effective control of their own affairs by local citizens and local communities.

In cities and in rural areas new laws and new policies are giving local governments direct responsibility for management of basic service provision, promotion of strategic planning and facilitation of sustainable local development. Decentralised structures are bringing government closer to the people and have the potential for enhancing both efficiency and democratic accountability.

- 1.2 In this context the promotion both of *good governance* and of *sustainable development* requires the strengthening of new and existing local democratic institutions and the encouragement of wider participation in social, economic and political activities across all sections of local communities. Where elected by universal suffrage, local governments and city councils are expected to serve the interests and promote the well-being of local people and local organisations.

Unlike other 'non-state actors' in civil society, democratic local governments derive their authority from the ballot box and can be held accountable by local citizens. However, if inadequate attention is paid to the promotion of civic education and empowerment, and if inadequate resources are devoted to the strengthening of local government institutions, the new policies of decentralisation cannot hope to be effective either in relation to the processes of democratisation or the efficient delivery of services.

- 1.3 International development cooperation contributes significantly to effective decentralisation. Traditionally this has been seen as the concern of international agencies, national governments, institutional experts and consultants. But it is now increasingly being recognised that cities, local governments and other local government institutions have a major potential contribution to make to international programmes of development cooperation - via Decentralised Cooperation and **Municipal International Cooperation (MIC)**.

- 1.4 The International Union of Local Authorities (IULA), a democratically accountable body representing the interests of local governments and their national associations in all regions of the world, exists to promote the strengthening of democratic local government. The Worldwide Declaration of Local Self-Government published by IULA sets out the fundamental principles of democratic local government systems.



Underpinning the series of international summits begun at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro and culminating with the 1996 UN Cities Summit (HABITAT II) in Istanbul, the 32nd IULA World Congress, organised in The Hague in September 1995, challenged local government organisations worldwide to play their part in piloting new, decentralised approaches to the promotion of democracy and development - a "Local Way to Innovation in International Cooperation". This challenge has been taken up by the IULA Platform for Capacity and Institution Building and by associated organisations of the IULA network.

The purpose of this paper is to set out the policy and strategy of IULA on matters relating to Municipal International Cooperation (MIC) in the wider context of new moves to encourage Decentralised Development Cooperation and to promote sustainable local development.

2 Decentralised Development Cooperation MIC

- 2.1 IULA is committed both to the strengthening of pluralist, democratic institutions at local level and to encouraging the growth of effective civil society organisations. Such a commitment requires a balanced approach towards building the democratic and operational capacity of local government bodies on the one hand and on the other encouraging a facilitative role on the part of such bodies in their dealings with other sectors and other actors in civil society—encouraging partnerships between local governments and their communities, including partnerships with the private sector.
- 2.2 Across the globe national and international donor organisations are looking for new ways of supporting development assistance with a higher return for their investments - ways that will bring the fruits of development nearer to local communities and ordinary citizens. They have come to appreciate that skills and expertise exist at the local level, which can add value to international cooperation programmes.

Although it is recognised that national governments will continue to play an important role in shaping development policy, donors are increasingly committed to strengthening other sectors and key actors in civil society. In particular the search is on for new forms of **Decentralised (Development) Cooperation** which involve identifying priorities, project design, implementation and evaluation of programmes by partner organisations at sub-national level, both in donor and recipient countries. Such partners may include businesses, educational bodies, religious organisations, women's groups, training institutions, NGOs, community-based organisations and of course local governments.

- 2.3 Different international organisations (e.g. the European Union, the World Bank) have different views on the exact nature of Decentralised Cooperation. The IULA view is that the essence of the concept relates to development-focussed activities which involve direct participation and funding of non-state organisations and/or international partnerships between locally based bodies. The prime focus of IULA is on the role of local governments and their associated supporting institutions.

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- 2.4 Unlike central government departments and parastatal agencies, local governments have wide cross-sector responsibilities and the potential ability to develop integrated approaches in working with their communities. The task of the local authority is to enable all local actors to play their full part in promoting sustainable development, to establish clear policy goals reflecting local priorities and to administer a coherent and transparent regulatory framework.

Within the wider concept of Decentralised Cooperation the main concern of IULA and of its local government partners is to ensure the development of institutions in the local sphere of government that can effectively fulfil their statutory functions and also have the capacity and commitment to work in partnership with their communities.

- 2.5 The principle of partnership is also important at the international level, where institutional linkages between local government bodies (North, South, East and West) can make an important contribution to programmes of technical cooperation and capacity-building via **Municipal International Cooperation (MIC)**. Long-term institutional partnerships provide a continuing framework for activities designed to effect organisational change.
- 2.6 Within the term Municipal International Cooperation, IULA includes all international activities which involve local government organisations and practitioners working to strengthen democratic local government - often on a peer group or partnership basis.

In one sense, therefore, MIC is that part of Decentralised Cooperation that relates to the local government sector. However, local government interests (and institutions) legitimately extend beyond the local sphere to include the design and implementation of local government systems and decentralisation frameworks - activities which are undertaken at the national and international level.

This dimension of MIC, which also includes the development and strengthening of national associations (or federations) of local governments and their support networks at world and regional levels, constitutes an important aspect of overall processes of Decentralisation, and extends beyond the basic definition of Decentralised Cooperation.

- 2.7 At the grassroots level, and specifically within the concept of Decentralised Cooperation, IULA strongly encourages local governments to cooperate with community-based organisations in the development and promotion of international links and programmes designed to improve the quality of life in the communities involved.

3 The Key Objectives of Municipal International Cooperation (MIC)

Municipal International Cooperation offers a very direct and cost-effective medium for development cooperation, bringing together peers in partnerships based on appropriate professional expertise, innovation, joint-ownership and mutual benefit. Such partnerships have the advantages of being small-scale, targeted and usually based on a long-term commitment of the local government institutions involved, which provides for a strong element of continuity and sustainability.



In the context of worldwide moves towards decentralisation and democratic reform, IULA and its local government partners have a specific interest in the promotion of effective arrangements for governance at sub-national and local levels. Relevant MIC programme activities can make an effective contribution to:

- 3.1 The design of national policies and programmes for decentralisation;
- 3.2 The (re)structuring of democratic local government systems (including legal, financial and staffing frameworks and arrangements for human resource development);
- 3.3 Building the indigenous management and institutional capacity of local governments, including their capacity to participate as partners in MIC programmes and to make effective use of external donor funding;
- 3.4 Improving the skills of local government practitioners and the management of services delivered to local communities;
- 3.5 Strengthening local government institutions at the national level (eg democratically controlled national Associations, professional networks and training institutions);
- 3.6 Assisting development of effective democratic processes at the local level (including the role of local government in promoting civic education and empowerment of local citizens);
- 3.7 Strengthening the role of women in local government and local decision-making;
- 3.8 Strengthening the role of local governments as facilitators and leaders of sustainable local development with the capacity to contribute significantly to poverty alleviation and cohesion in society;
- 3.9 The development of decentralised fiscal systems.

4 The Role of IULA and its CIB Platform

IULA, its Regional Sections, national associations and partner organisations - in some cases individually, in others on a collaborative basis - play their part in a wide variety of technical cooperation, training and capacity building programmes.

Their commitment is to the development of strong and autonomous democratic local government systems which can relate coherently with other spheres of government without being totally dependent on them. In particular they:

- 4.1 Participate in the local government and public sector reform programmes of major donor agencies;

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- 4.2 Attract external donor funding for developing, managing and implementing MIC project activities on a bilateral or multilateral basis;
 - 4.3 Design and promote MIC programmes with the support of national development agencies and/or central government departments;
 - 4.4 Develop and manage their own inter-municipal and inter-association partnership programmes designed to strengthen local government capacity, to exchange information on good practice and to promote sustainable local development initiatives which enhance the quality of life in local communities;
 - 4.5 Assist with the establishment and strengthening of local government training and research institutions, information and documentation centres, regional support networks, professional and technical bodies and other support mechanisms necessary for the effective functioning of an autonomous local government sector;
 - 4.6 Make available local government personnel with specialist and technical expertise and practical knowledge of local democratic processes.

The IULA World Secretariat has recently been strengthened to enable it to facilitate the work of its member associations and partner organisations in Municipal International Cooperation and Decentralised Development Cooperation.

Working in conjunction with active IULA members and affiliated partner organisations in the IULA Capacity and Institution Building (CIB) Platform, the key responsibilities of the World Secretariat are to:

- Liaise with international donor organisations and play an advocacy role on behalf of local government;
- Facilitate and broker collaborative contractual arrangements in partnership with its network members;
- Assist member organisations to access donor funding;
- Act as a central information point on MIC activities and programmes, including the development and maintenance of an electronic database;
- Facilitate the development of common (best practice) methodology, tools and evaluation criteria for MIC activities;
- Assist with international marketing and mobilisation of the expertise, materials and products of members and partner organisations;
- Promote and support capacity building of its Regional Sections and National Associations in the South, including their capacity to liaise directly with donor organisations.

5 IULA Priorities and Strategy for Implementation

The paragraphs below set out the commitment of IULA as an organisation to the development and promotion of Municipal International Cooperation and the key priorities it shares with its network of members and associates.

- 5.1 Give high priority to securing funding and support for programmes which are designed to strengthen the capacity of national associations/federations of local governments, particularly in the South.
- 5.2 Seek to secure funding for programmes which will enhance exchange of experience within the local government sector and improve local government access to electronic communication and networking facilities (particularly in poorer developing countries and economies in transition).
- 5.3 Support new initiatives designed to promote the role of women within local government and to address other gender-related issues.
- 5.4 Give high priority to programmes and projects concerned with strengthening the role of local governments as facilitators of sustainable local development.
- 5.5 Secure stronger support from international and donor organisations for inter-municipal partnerships designed to mobilise technical and community support for exchange of experience, training, technology transfer and joint initiatives with a focus on sustainable development (including South/South partnerships).
- 5.6 Actively encourage programmes which promote local government partnerships with the private sector, Non-Governmental and Community-based Organisations.
- 5.7 Advise relevant ministries and departments of national governments on their decentralisation policies and programmes, in collaboration with and with the approval of the national association/s of local governments of the country in question.
- 5.8 Seek to ensure that public sector reform programmes concerned with decentralisation and local government reform involve consultation with and participation of local government bodies in the recipient countries concerned.
- 5.9 Develop collaborative programmes with the international partner organisations of IULA and take a joint leadership role on MIC within the post-HABITAT evolving World Associations of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination (WACLAC) framework.

Priority-setting, accessing funding and implementation will be carried out on the advice of and with the support of the newly strengthened IULA Platform for Capacity and Institution Building (CIB), in coordination with IULA members and Regional Sections as appropriate.

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The International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) is an association of local governments and their representative organisations, with members in all regions of the world. The mission of IULA includes the following goals:

- to develop and maintain a strong democratic political organisation;
- to be the worldwide advocate and voice of local government;
- to be the worldwide source of key information and intelligence regarding local government;
- to be the worldwide source of learning, exchange and capacity building programmes on democratic local government.

This policy paper on Municipal International Cooperation (MIC) was endorsed by the World Executive Committee of IULA at its meeting of 5 April 1997, held in Mauritius.

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