

Declaration

Abuja 2014

Promoting regional cooperation and local economic development: West African Symposium

Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Directors of Local Government, Chairpersons, Presidents and Secretaries General of Associations and representatives from local authorities from the Commonwealth West African countries (Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone), met in Abuja, Nigeria, on the 10th of June 2014. Participants also included United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Mobilising for Development (M4D), and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF). The meeting was hosted by the Nigerian Ministry of Special Duties and Intergovernmental Affairs, and funded by DFID as part of the CLGF programme: Supporting local governance and local economic development in the Commonwealth.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss greater cooperation between the local government sector of the participating countries and possible partners and entry points for engagement with ECOWAS. It also sought to agree a set of common development priorities for local government in the region, and to validate the plan of activities outlined in the technical meeting held in December 2013 in Accra, Ghana. The discussion focused on three core areas:

Common priorities for the local government sector in West Africa

Participants recognised the need to improve the capacity for local government service delivery in the region, identified the following priority areas for work:

- Implementing and institutionalising decentralisation and local democracy
- Strengthening fiscal decentralisation
- Promoting more effective intergovernmental coordination
- Local economic development
- Building participation and local accountability in service delivery (including in LED)
- knowledge sharing through a regional platform, and joint advocacy at national, regional and Commonwealth levels

Participants recognised the value of regional exchange and support, welcomed the recent publication of the UNDP paper on Decentralisation in West and Central Africa, and the commitment to collaborate on an Africa wide programme. They commended the recent work of CLGF in support of the Constitutional review in Nigeria where Commonwealth good practice has been fed in through the Local Government Association (ALGON), and they welcomed the establishment of the CLGF West Africa office, hosted by NALAG in Accra. Participants pledged to continue this commitment to exchange and proposed a regular regional forum to bring the local government sector of the region together. They also recommended using the existing structures of CLGF and regional champions of decentralisation at the level of heads of Government in West Africa to support the implementation of decentralisation and the Aberdeen Principles.

LED is a key regional priority, and there are a number of core areas where the project should support practitioners in West Africa:

- Developing, strengthening and implementing national LED policies
- Building the capacity of local government practitioners to implement LED policies
- Practical pilot project addressing key priorities including:

- SME development and support,
- Sustainable financing for LED,
- Linking LED to local revenue mobilisation strategies and improved service delivery,
- Coordination between and mobilisation of local stakeholders on LED,
- Engaging the community especially marginalised groups,
- Building partnerships with the private sector and other potential service delivery partners,
- Testing new and innovative approaches

Challenges and opportunities presented by greater regional integration in West Africa

Participants welcomed the input from Southern and Eastern Africa on their respective processes towards greater recognition from their regional bodies. The key element of exchange between and within the Local Government sector in a region was highlighted as a first step towards identifying regional priorities.

Participants discussed the advance towards greater integration of the region and recognised the importance of ECOWAS in this process, as well as the potential role it could play in promoting and strengthening policy dialogue on regional issues related to local government and development. Participants also welcomed the commitment of UCLGA to collaborate with CLGF in this regard.

Local government is an active player in each of the priority areas ECOWAS has highlighted in its 2020 vision, and should be recognised as an important partner.

Outcomes

Participants of the West African Regional Symposium

1 endorsed the revised programme of work and committed to further developing and undertaking the activities;

2 committed to greater regional cooperation on priority issues, such as implementation of decentralisation and LED, and advocacy to strengthen decentralisation and local democracy in the region;

3 recognised that policy decision within ECOWAS have a significant impact on local government across the region, and called on the regional and international local government organisations (such as CLGF and UCLGA) to work together in identify entry points to open dialogue with the regional body on those points within its strategic plan where the cross over is strongest. A key next step in this process will be to bring together local government practitioners from across the full territory covered by ECOWAS to share concerns and priorities and to build a strategy of unified work.

4 called on all countries to participate in the ongoing consultation on the Post-2015 development agenda and stressed local governments role as an implementing partner in the new SDGs. They also noted the importance of local governments to have adequate resources to take forward their role as development agents at the local level.