

# Local Government: A partner in achieving the SDGs in Asia

## CLGF South Asia Regional Conference

3 -4 August 2016, Jabalpur, India

### Meeting conclusions

Local government leaders, senior officials from local and central government, representatives of local government associations, development partners, academics and the private sector met on the 3-4 August 2016 to discuss the role of local government as a partner in achieving the SDGs in Asia.

The participants agreed that the meeting offered a timely chance to reflect on how to move towards localisation of the SDGs, the importance of a strong national dialogue around alignment of national development strategies and the SDGs, and within that, how to ensure that local government has the necessary skills and capacities to take the framework of the SDGs and align the priorities of local communities with these important national and global commitments.

Participants welcomed the experience of local economic development gained from the pilot projects and recommended local economic development as a useful approach for achieving social, economic and spatial development and to enable local government to play a strong role in achieving the SDGs. They noted the progress being made across the region to harness ICT and to develop innovative solutions to urban governance and service delivery through SMART Cities.

#### South Asia context

They noted the current development challenges facing the countries in the region which include inequality, unemployment, managing informality, poverty, climate change and rapid urbanisation among others, and that these require local government to play a more developmental role in the delivery of services. The priorities set out in the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement are not new for local governments, which are already actively involved in delivering many of the core services that will contribute to achieving them, such as water, sanitation, primary health care, and infrastructure. However, to deliver its core mandate and fully contribute to achieving the SDGs and addressing climate change, local government needs the requisite capacity, finances, and empowerment.

#### Key challenges in the region

The meeting recognised the important lessons and good practice emerging from the work supported by DFID and the Commonwealth Secretariat in the region, and highlighted the following ongoing issues affecting local government's ability to effectively implement local economic development:

- Uneven levels of decentralisation, and inconsistencies in implementing decentralisation;
- Changing labour markets and youth unemployment;
- Women's under-employment, and lack of access to opportunities for skills development;
- Harnessing the opportunities of new technology and ICT;
- Inadequate capacity within local authorities (political and technical);
- Inadequate appropriate local data;
- Inadequate access to financing for development.



## **Lessons from the field**

Participants recognised that local economic development must be locally appropriate and context-specific. Pilot projects implemented in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India highlighted important principles for effective local economic development:

- Partnership with communities, private sector, NGOs, civil society, academia, other levels of government and public sector organisations
- Community ownership of and participation in economic development processes
- Transformational leadership at all levels
- National enabling frameworks
- A clear regulatory and enabling environment at the local level e.g. through bylaws
- A locally owned strategic vision and strategy for local economic development
- Effective local institutional arrangements for multi-stakeholder engagement
- The role of local government in capacity building for SMEs and marginalised communities
- Developing community consensus on the need to generate local revenue to support local development
- The importance of integration and convergence of national, state and local programmes to support local economic activity

## **Priority actions**

Building on these core outcomes participants prioritised the following actions which will be key in achieving the SDGs and delivering local economic development:

- Champion localisation of the SDGs and raise awareness across the region at all levels and with local citizens, including on the importance of local government involvement in national SDG monitoring processes;
- National and subnational governments should take a lead in building awareness of local government's role in achieving the SDGs
- Strengthen LGAs as advocates for localising the SDGs and develop the capacity of their members to align their service delivery with the achievement of the SDGs
- Develop the technical and leadership capacity of all stakeholders involved in LED to ensure full political buy-in at all levels
- Strengthen community development, including building entrepreneurial skills for women, youth and marginalised communities, to address inequalities and increase engagement between citizens and their local governments
- Recognise informality and the informal economy and enhancing local government's strategic planning capacity to ensure inclusive local development towards achieving the SDGs
- Strengthen decentralisation and legislation to ensure a clear mandate for local government, including with respect to local economic development
- Empower local government as a development partner, including through direct transfers of funds for local development, and build local government's ability to raise revenue and access financing for development
- Strengthen local government's ability to enter into vertical and horizontal partnerships (including with civil society and the private sector) and enhance intergovernmental frameworks
- Build trust and social capital with local communities and other stakeholders, through greater transparency and accountability, to ensure productive partnerships for local development
- Embrace the use of ICT to improve democratic engagement, strengthen service delivery and support M&E
- Share good practice on SMART cities and the use of ICT in localising the SDGs



- Support inter-regional exchange, local government to local government cooperation, strategies for putting policies into practice, and the exchange of good practice
- Develop local government's capacity to collect locally appropriate data to enable planning, M&E and to feed into national SDG reporting processes

**Participants:**

- Recognised the supportive role of CLGF's South Asia office in the project implementation and in supporting regional exchange and dialogue.
- Looked forward to working with CLGF to develop its programming in the region to support decentralisation and good governance; localisation of the SDGs; and further piloting and scaling up of local economic development initiatives.
- Welcomed the participation of representatives from local government in Bhutan and the Municipal Association of Nepal as observers, SAARC's role in the meeting, and the opportunities for closer engagement with SAARC.
- Stressed the need for ensuring political buy-in from ministries of local government, and emphasised the importance of coordination with other regional partners and programmes.
- Endorsed the Terms of Reference for the South Asia Forum of Local Government (SAFLG) as one mechanism for coordination and regional exchange on local government policy and practice.
- Recommended that national delegations should advocate with Ministers of Foreign Affairs to see the role of local government in achieving the SDGs recognised at the forthcoming SAARC Summit in Islamabad in November 2016.
- Expressed appreciation to DFID and the Commonwealth Secretariat for support provided for CLGF's work, thanked the speakers and participants for their excellent contributions, and looked forward to continued engagement with them and other partners, including from the private sector.

Jabalpur, India  
4 August 2016