



# **CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT THROUGH REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT ON LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Southern Africa Regional LED Conference  
17-18 March 2014, Lilongwe, Malawi**

## **Outcomes statement**

### **Introduction**

Senior local government practitioners from Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe gathered in Lilongwe, Malawi, 17-18 March 2014 to explore opportunities for enhanced integration of Local Economic Development (LED) in national and local development policies and programmes through regional engagement. Hon Mrs Rachel Mazombwe Zulu MP, Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Malawi opened the event and gave the official opening address.

Participants included continental and regional organisations including the African Union's All Africa Ministerial Conference on Decentralization and Local Development (AMCOD), the United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLGA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF). Representatives from leading academic and national training institutions contributed to the event.

The conference was hosted by the Malawi Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, in partnership with CLGF, through its DFID funded regional programme, and UNDP. A background paper '*Local Government and Local Economic Development in Southern Africa*' authored by Prof Kadmiel Wekwete provided a sound foundation to the deliberations.

Participants acknowledged the conference as building on the Cardiff Consensus for Local Economic Development (2011), and contributing towards the international celebration of 2014 as the Year of Developmental Local Government and the wider United Nations deliberations to ensure that local government's role in the post 2015 development agenda is fully recognised, notably through the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including in the area of economic growth and development;

Participants further acknowledged the fundamental role that LED should play in the realisation of the African Union's vision for 2063, since they are convinced that the vision can be achieved only if it is driven from the grass-roots level.

The conference sought to

- Cultivate a shared understanding of the LED approach, including the meaning, principles, scope and diversity of LED in the context of local government at country and regional level.
- Promote regional engagement on local government policy around the LED approach to development, including exploring how local government's role in economic development could be better reflected within the SADC agenda.
- Seek commitment to embracing the LED approach to development to inform national frameworks and local LED strategies.

## **Role of local government in LED**

The Conference acknowledged the developmental role of local government in creating an enabling environment that promotes local economic growth and improves the quality of life of all citizens. Economic growth is central to reducing poverty and attaining shared prosperity.

LED is characterised as a locally owned approach which enables local stakeholders to understand their economy, identify their needs, mobilise resources internally and externally, and jointly take actions aimed at improving the local economy to realise its full potential. National economic growth is the congruence of local economies.

In order to achieve this local government should mainstream LED into their work, through development planning, provision of appropriate infrastructure, collaboration with the private sector, and other stakeholders. Participants noted that the economy in Southern Africa is largely informal and that LED strategies must recognise and ensure a place for the informal sector in urban areas. LED must also support economic transformation in the rural areas.

## **Emerging issues and priorities**

Acknowledging that LED is an approach and way of conducting the business of local government, participants identified the following emerging issues, priorities and practical challenges to delivering LED in the region.

- Lack of appropriate policy frameworks and legislation at the central government level to ensure local government has a mandate to promote LED;
- The need for a common understanding of LED among stakeholders;
- LED has been largely seen as a series of projects rather than a strategic process.
- There is often a deficiency of long-term planning for LED and integration with economic planning at other levels;
- Mainstream development processes, such as sectoral approaches, are top-down and often do not adequately address the needs of localities. National economic growth depends heavily on sustained growth at the local level;
- LED has not been conceptualised around the realities and contexts in Africa, especially with respect to the needs of the poor and the role of the informal economy;
- There is limited funding and resources for LED;
- The need for clarity on the role of the different stakeholders in LED;
- Local government requires better professional capacity to implement LED effectively;
- General lack of political support and commitment for local government's role in LED;
- LED should be given priority as part of local government's core business;
- The private sector is often not mobilised as a partner in LED initiatives;
- There are limited knowledge resources and information on good practices in LED;
- The need to engage with SADC to ensure that they incorporate LED in the SADC regional growth strategy;
- The relationship between local government and SADC should be institutionalised.

## **Recommendations**

- ❖ LED should be adopted as an approach to development and be mainstreamed into the work of local government in the region;
- ❖ Central government should ensure enabling legislation and a national policy on LED mandating local government to play its full role in LED;
- ❖ Develop the capacity of local government and other stakeholders to deliver effective LED, including through identification of centres of excellence;
- ❖ The Local Government Ministers' Forum, SARO, CLGF and UNDP should work together to develop a regional action plan to implement agreed policy positions and recommendations on LED;

- ❖ Identify new and existing financial resources to support LED, including partnerships with the private sector;
- ❖ Promote research, documentation, knowledge sharing, and exchange of good practice through a range of different instruments locally, nationally, regionally and internationally. This should include an annual report on LED in the region;
- ❖ Promote regional exchanges, country to country co-operation, municipal partnerships and twinning within and outside the region, to promote understanding and learning on LED;
- ❖ Implement the commitments made regionally, nationally and locally to achieve LED;
- ❖ Agree on a strategy for institutionalisation of local government within SADC;
- ❖ Call on central governments and development partners to build on their existing commitments and actively continue to support and fund relevant LED initiatives in the region;
- ❖ Use the Commonwealth 2014 Year of Developmental Local Government to promote developmental local government, share good practice, and to galvanise action on LED;
- ❖ Support the localisation of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, including on economic growth, to ensure that they reflect the role of local government in setting, implementing and monitoring the goals.

SADC Ministers of Local Government are requested to endorse the recommendations at their meeting in Lilongwe following the regional event.