

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reflects the priorities of citizens around the world. In an unprecedented effort, intergovernmental negotiations of the new agenda were informed by the views and priorities of people on the ground. As a result, the agreed global sustainable development agenda places people at the center of future sustainable development efforts, bolstering citizen engagement and empowering them as experts and beneficiaries participating in decision making.

Actors at local and regional level representing and serving citizens are diverse, encompassing a range of territorial jurisdictions from global megacities to rural districts, with varied relationships to national political systems and development cooperation programmes. They include mayors and local governments, regions, provinces, districts and other government entities and their associations, as well as other actors, such as community leaders, grassroots organizations, parliamentarians, trade unions, business leaders, and representatives of bi- and multilateral partners.

This brief focuses on the role of local and regional governments in monitoring, review and knowledge sharing of development cooperation as an important effort to support implementation of the 2030 agenda. The brief builds on a literature review and interviews. It is organized in four parts: First it aims to highlight the diverse contributions of local authorities in development cooperation. It then contextualizes local and regional governments in the new sustainable development agenda and within national systems, followed by an assessment of how they can support monitoring and review of development cooperation and related challenges. The brief concludes with a series of policy recommendations to strengthen their support of the 2030 Agenda.

The objective of the brief is four-fold: (a) to produce greater understanding of the roles local authorities can play in knowledge sharing and mutual learning on development cooperation and producing long-lasting development results at local level; (b) to illustrate monitoring and review of development cooperation commitments and results at the local level; (c) to assess good practices of such monitoring and review; and (d) to identify challenges and incentives for the active engagement of local authorities in policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and mutual learning to promote implementation of 2030 Agenda.

Why monitor development cooperation for the 2030 Agenda?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is universally applicable, broader in scope, has a multiplicity of sources, and is significantly more complex to measure. It is reliant on a revitalized global partnership, recognizing the need for a monitoring and review framework that equally focusses on inputs and results for development; and engages with multiple stakeholders, including actors at the local level.

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) recognized the need to ensure participation of all actors, including local authorities, in mechanisms for follow-up and review of the SDGs and their means of implementation.

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) has commissioned analytical work on monitoring and review of development cooperation at local level to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the AAAA.

This brief focuses on challenges and prospects in this area and aims to provide an overview of key considerations and dynamics, generating ideas and guidance for policy makers and practitioners in advance of the High-level Meeting of the Development Cooperation Forum in New York in July 2016.

The brief is based on analytical work by Mr. Erik Lundsgaarde, researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies. The views presented do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.



1. LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Many local and regional governments serve as important brokers, adapting nationally agreed development priorities to the needs of the people they serve and represent. They contribute to shaping development planning related to the identification of local and national priorities, and the promotion of alignment and harmonization.

Local and regional governments also act as implementing agents for external partners of development cooperation. Via decentralized development cooperation, local actors serve as de facto providers and recipients of development cooperation, participants in knowledge-sharing platforms, and may assume multiple roles simultaneously.¹ They can also serve as core stakeholders in public-private partnerships (see table 1).

Table 1: Channels for the delivery of development cooperation at local level

Implementing Partner for Programmatic Assistance (Diverse sectors)
Project assistance (Diverse sectors)
Support by external partners for decentralization and government capacity building
Decentralized development cooperation
Public-Private Partnerships
Private Development Cooperation

Yet, local and regional governments are not development agencies. Their development cooperation roles may only be a small component of their mandates in managing resources, providing services, and overseeing a political arena in which numerous other actors (businesses, civil society organizations, or academic institutions) contribute to shaping development outcomes within their jurisdictions. They can serve as agents assessing the commitments and results of other actors or be scrutinized for the effectiveness of local-level service delivery by citizens in different forms.²

Local and regional governments can therefore be a linchpin for multiple monitoring and accountability chains: between development cooperation partners and local level governments, between levels of government, and between local authorities and citizens. Their ability to effectively assume different roles is influenced by the actual decision-making competencies and resources they are granted. In many countries local and regional governments find themselves confronted with new tasks and responsibilities that are often not commensurate with available capacity and resources. This brief will show that the potential of local and regional governments in implementing and monitoring development cooperation is often limited by capacity constraints in a number of areas.

2. THE CONTRIBUTION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS TO GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

The varied development contributions of local authorities have been acknowledged in debates on the contours of the new global sustainable development agenda and the approaches needed to promote its successful implementation. Local authorities have actively promoted the inclusion of an urbanization-focused SDG to reflect the importance of cities as agents of economic growth and sustainable resource use.³ Local roles in water and sanitation and ecosystems management are also highlighted as part of the 2030 Agenda.

Although local and regional governments have attracted growing interest among key development actors, international development cooperation continues to center primarily around the country level as the arena for the articulation of citizen needs and the implementation of cooperation programs. This country focus is expected to persist with the transition to a more expansive and universal sustainable development agenda. Goal 11 and targets related to local resources will provide entry points for local and regional governments to the formulation, implementation and assessment of their actions as part of national development efforts. The remainder of this section focuses on one determining variable of the role of LRGs – decentralization – and an example of global efforts to promote the role of LRGs in global development, namely, effectiveness of local level development cooperation. This provides a rationale for the importance of furthering work on monitoring at the local level, keeping in mind specific country and sub-national policy contexts.

Local and regional governments in different country contexts – the case of decentralization

¹ Agustí Fernández de Losada. 2013. Effective Decentralized Development Cooperation: Flows, Modalities, and Challenges. Draft Study. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

² Namhla Mniki-Mangaliso. 2015. Citizen-based monitoring of development cooperation to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda. 2016 DCF Policy Brief No. 9 (October 2015).

³ Intervention of the Local Authorities Major Group at the Ninth Session of the General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG OWG-9).

The evolution of the place of local authorities on the development agenda is also linked to the progression of decentralization processes across the developing world, involving the transfer of responsibilities, resources, and decision-making authorities from central governments to subsidiary levels of government.⁴ Examining the contribution that local authorities can make to the formulation, implementation, and assessment of development cooperation priorities and programs thus requires consideration of their embeddedness in national structures revolving around National Sustainable Development Strategies.

A core justification for strengthening local authorities via decentralization is that local governments have the potential to improve needs assessments and can act as a focal point for engaging local stakeholders including civil society and private sector entities in identifying development priorities.⁵ At the same time, the local level is where development results may be most directly visible, suggesting a natural local role in assessing progress associated with diverse interventions and providing feedback on how to improve development cooperation.

Decentralization is by its nature a politically sensitive process, the rationale, depth and success of which are dependent on the country context and the nature of political frameworks and regulations setting out how responsibilities are divided and coordinated between different levels of administration. Experiences with decentralization have fallen short of expectations in many cases, provoking some observers to note that decentralization is globally stalled.⁶ One explanation for this is an inadequate transfer of resources to enable local governments to assume new responsibilities. Although estimates of funding from national governments or external development cooperation partners to local authorities are scarce, they are generally considered to be small in scale.⁷ National-level factors such as the political commitment of central governments to reform and local-level factors related to the quality and inclusiveness of local governance also present obstacles to decentralization.⁸

Local-level effectiveness of development cooperation

Associations of local authorities have emphasized the role of local authorities in promoting the effectiveness of development cooperation at the global level. They supported the articulation of needs in consultation with citizens at the sub-national level, helped build capacities of local administrations to manage international development resources, and promoted improved division of labor among external development cooperation partners.⁹ As such, a common position on effectiveness of development cooperation provided by local and regional governments has evolved over the years.



ability in development cooperation.¹¹

The 2014 DCF concluded that a recognized monitoring and accountability framework for development cooperation at global level must build on coherent, transparent, inclusive and participatory accountability mechanisms at national and local levels. Participants called for approaches and instruments fostering effective development cooperation at local level, in order to avoid fragmentation and overlap of actions, aligned to the needs of citizens, in terms of service delivery and the provision of global public goods.¹⁰ The 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness also encouraged a stronger role for local governments in promoting accounta-

⁴ Decentralisation and Local Government: Decentralisation in German Development Cooperation. German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (2008).

⁵ Post-2015 Global Development Agenda: Making the Case for Decentralization and Local Governance. Development Partners Working Group on Decentralization and Local Governance. Working Paper 2 (February 2013).

⁶ French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development. 2014. Thematic Evaluation of France's Support for Decentralization and Territorial Governance. Paris: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development.

⁷ European Commission. 2013. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (15.05.2013) COM (2013) 280 Final.

⁸ Jan Willem Nibbering and Rolf Swart. Giving Local Government a More Central Place in Development: An Examination of Donor Support for Decentralization.

⁹ UCLG Position Paper on Aid Effectiveness and Local Government: Understanding the Link Between Governance and Development (2009).

¹⁰ See: http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/julyhls/pdf14/summary_local_dimension.pdf.

¹¹ Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (2011).

The political function of subnational governments beyond service delivery contributions was also referenced at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development held in July 2015, highlighting subnational responsibilities in revenue management, local obligations to contribute to transparent and accountable resource use, and the need to strengthen capacities at subnational levels to improve government performance.¹²

The monitoring, review and accountability role of local authorities is similarly acknowledged in the 2030 Agenda context, where regular subnational reviews of progress are listed as one component of a multi-level monitoring framework.¹³

3. LOCAL LEVEL MONITORING AND REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Monitoring and review are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. Adequate structures at all levels are key to help track progress against commitments and provide an evidence base to improve results. Such efforts are an established practice in international development cooperation where a focus on effectiveness, results and impact has been prevalent for many years. Effective monitoring emphasizes the learning process associated with development cooperation activities. The form that monitoring and review efforts take is context-specific, and depends on the scope of cooperation and the stakeholders involved.

As outlined above, local and regional governments play a vital role in the implementation of development cooperation and they can have an integral role to play in promoting the flow of monitoring information between local and national levels. Their participation in development cooperation monitoring and review is broadly shaped by their position within national systems and by the responsibilities assigned by central governments, the locus for development planning and implementation.

Even though monitoring systems will likely continue to have a country-level orientation or otherwise feed into it,¹⁴ efforts to “localize” the agenda and the growing awareness of the roles of local and regional governments as implementing agents can be expected to have an impact on how they engage in monitoring, review and knowledge sharing efforts. Their engagement can take various forms (table 2).

Table 2: Delivery channels and monitoring roles at the local level

Cooperation Channel	Monitoring Role for Local and Regional Governments
Implementing Partner for Programmatic Assistance (Diverse sectors)	Component of country-level monitoring processes and shaped by national line ministries and citizen-led monitoring
Project assistance (Diverse sectors)	Project-specific, shaped by bilateral and multilateral monitoring frameworks
Support by external partners for decentralization and government capacity building	Project-specific, shaped by bilateral and multilateral monitoring frameworks
Decentralized development cooperation	Project-specific, linked to monitoring frameworks of subnational actors in development cooperation
Public-Private Partnerships	Dependent on management role of local public partners
Private Development Cooperation	Limited

The potential for enhancing the role of local and regional governments and other local actors in development cooperation monitoring and review depends therefore at a basic level on the nature of their attributed responsibilities and empowerment within these structures. At a broad level, local empowerment is linked to the creation of inclusive multi-stakeholder processes for influencing national priorities and monitoring their implementation.

¹² Addis Ababa Action Agenda, OP 34 and 48. See also: GTF2016. Post-2015 Global Development Agenda towards Habitat III. (2015). Financing Local and Regional Governments: the Missing Link in Sustainable Development Finance.

¹³ United Nations (September 2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development (A/70/L.1.).

¹⁴ Indicators and Monitoring Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals: Launching a Data Revolution for the SDGs. A Report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations by the Leadership Council of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (May 15, 2015).

Being close to where projects are implemented and the affected citizens live, local and regional governments, if adequately resourced, can have relevant expertise on the ground readily available. In reality, national-level development cooperation operations may bypass local and regional governments in monitoring and review efforts. They play a more direct monitoring role in decentralized development cooperation, where they are the locus for reviewing implementation progress, reporting on expenditures and bottlenecks and setting up dialogue structures to ensure all stakeholders are informed and content. Depending on the capacity of the local or regional government, these responsibilities can pose a burden.

Concrete experiences in monitoring at the local level show that when local and regional governments are strengthened by receiving more independence and adequate resources, they can follow project implementation progress more efficiently, thus addressing problems and informing the national level more quickly.

Challenges for Local and Regional Governments

Official country-level monitoring of development cooperation generally takes place via annual assessment forums involving national governments and cooperation partners or sector-specific forums involving representatives of partner country line ministries, where local authorities are often minimally represented.¹⁵ Key factors that contribute to effective monitoring at this level include the availability of national development cooperation policies, country results frameworks, and quality information on resource flows. The success of country-level monitoring also hinges upon the political commitment to monitoring, review and knowledge sharing among all stakeholders and the presence of an enabling institutional environment. The same factors are relevant in understanding the potential for local monitoring in programmatic approaches, as establishing robust monitoring in this context requires the simultaneous and mutually reinforcing improvement of planning and statistical capacities at the national and subnational levels.¹⁶

Monitoring arrangements currently in place reflect the diversity of channels for cooperation. Even a single external partner may support multiple monitoring approaches depending on the scope of the activities being monitored, their thematic focus, the characteristics of the national setting for implementation, and the intended audience for monitoring outputs.¹⁷ The pressure to justify development spending to a domestic audience has encouraged external partners to establish parallel monitoring frameworks that reflect their specific interests, a practice inconsistent with aid effectiveness commitments which may exacerbate existing capacity deficits by increasing the reporting burden for partners.¹⁸

To advance dialogue on how to promote more inclusive monitoring practices at the local level, external partners can draw on their experiences with participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches. Intended to integrate stakeholder knowledge and interests into different stages of a project cycle, a core element of participatory monitoring involves stakeholder identification of relevant indicators to assess progress.¹⁹



As sources and forms of cooperation proliferate, the collection and analysis of data assessing the performance of a multitude of activities absorbs growing financial and human resources from local authorities, national governments, and external partners. While narrowly defined projects (for example, sector-specific activities carried out in collaboration with subnational cooperation providers) may individually have lean monitoring requirements, the accumulation of such projects can strain the administrative resources needed to track progress and hinder the consolidation of usable information on indicators of success to inform local decision-making.

¹⁵ Angela Bester. 2015. Scoping Study on Monitoring, Review, and Accountability of Development Cooperation to Support Implementation of a Post-2015 Agenda.

¹⁶ Christiane Loquai and Sonia Le Bay. 2007. Building Capacities for Monitoring and Evaluating Decentralisation and Local Governance: Experiences, Challenges, and Perspectives. In Brief no. 19. Maastricht: European Centre for Development Policy Management.

¹⁷ DANIDA. 2006. Monitoring at Programme and Project Level: General Issues. Technical Note. Copenhagen: Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹⁸ Sarah Holzapfel. 2014. The Role of Indicators in Development Cooperation: An Overview Study with a Special Focus on the Use of Key and Standard Indicators. DIE Studies 81. Bonn: Deutsches Institut fuer Entwicklungspolitik (DIE).

¹⁹ African Development Bank. 2001. Handbook on Stakeholder Consultation and Participation.

External development cooperation partners can address these challenges by strengthening their commitment to collective implementation and alignment with local and national strategies and abandoning project-based monitoring in favor of standardized formats designed by local authorities. Considerations on the reform of monitoring practice need to be driven by the informational needs of both local actors and external partners. Examining the general constraints that local authorities face in tracking resource flows within their territorial jurisdictions and feeding this information into management processes is therefore critical. In basic terms, reflections on how to enable local monitoring should focus on the dual challenges of streamlining data collection and increasing local capacities to play a key role in generating information on development results.



Efforts to improve development cooperation monitoring at different levels can be considered an extension of efforts to support beneficiary empowerment by strengthening their role in the articulation of priorities in development planning and their involvement in implementation. In a monitoring context, a focus on broader development outcomes instead of agency-specific markers of progress or outputs indicates a step in this direction. Monitoring can therefore be considered as one element of a longer planning cycle where an awareness of limitations of information collection in a particular context should inform the approach to monitoring.²⁰ This point underlines that the effective participation of local actors in monitoring processes is also related to their involvement in earlier stages of program design, suggesting that engagement in planning and implementation may improve the functionality of monitoring approaches and contribute to positive development outcomes.

Challenges to local government engagement in development cooperation monitoring and review reflect general limitations of local administrations. The policy framework for decentralization, the financial resource base of local governments, the qualifications of administrative personnel, and the nature of organizational management systems are considered important determinants of effective local governance.²¹ While the availability of quality data on development indicators is also often cited as an impediment to greater transparency and accountability, the collection of usable information on development progress can also be constrained by the skills that data collectors possess, the capacity to analyze information generated at the local level, and the availability of platforms to systematize this information to allow for improved exchange on good practices and learning beyond confined local settings.

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These concerns related to local participation in development cooperation planning and monitoring have been acknowledged by a wide range of subnational actors, national governments, and external development cooperation partners. To continue to advance efforts to localize the development agenda, local authorities and external partners can draw on the expertise accumulated through regional and global initiatives. The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) platform has proposed considerations for developing locally-specific indicators of SDG achievement, for example, while UNDP's ART Initiative has engaged with various territorial jurisdictions in diverse country settings to articulate local development needs, promote local-level coordination among external development cooperation partners, foster joint planning among communities and external actors, and develop and diffuse participatory planning and monitoring instruments adapted to local circumstances.²² The importance of disaggregating indicators to reflect specific subnational challenges and facilitate local-level monitoring is a key lesson learned from implementing and monitoring the MDGs that should inform monitoring efforts in the 2030 Agenda era.²³

²⁰ United Nations Development Programme (2009). Handbook on Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluating for Development Results.

²¹ GIZ. 'Support for Local Governance Processes' <http://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/23692.html>

²² For information on UCLG's work in disaggregating SDG indicators, see: http://www.sef-bonn.org/fileadmin/Die_SEF/Veranstaltungen/BoSy/2014_bosy_background-paper_mattern.pdf ; for information on the UNDP-ART Initiative see http://www.europe.undp.org/content/geneva/en/home/partnerships_initiatives/art-initiative.html

²³ For an example of lessons learned in a specific regional setting, please see: Regional Coordination Mechanism for Europe and Central Asia / United Nations Development Group for Europe and Central Asia. *The Millennium Development Goals in Europe and Central Asia: Lessons on Monitoring and Implementation of the MDGs for the post-2015 Development Agenda, based upon Five Illustrative Case Studies.*

4. CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

Given the diversity of cooperation channels and local circumstances, enhancing the role of local authorities in development cooperation monitoring and review cannot proceed according to a uniform template. Nevertheless, a number of general reflections can be put forward to inform contributions by external partners, national governments, and local government actors to advance this agenda.

External partners can influence local authorities' capabilities through the nature of the support they provide and the monitoring frameworks they promote. Assistance to advance local governance improvements represents a direct channel for external partners to enhance administrative capacities at the local level. If advancing local monitoring of development cooperation is a priority in a given country context, it follows that external partners should ensure that resources are directed to equipping local administrations with the financial base, skilled personnel, and internal management systems to enable better tracking of development progress within their jurisdictions.



At the same time, external partners can limit additional burdens on local authorities' capacities by streamlining their own monitoring frameworks, for example by being more selective about data and indicators to collect. They can also contribute to improving the availability of information on cooperation activities by expanding the scope of reporting in aid management platforms and geocoding of cooperation data to illuminate the territorial distribution of resource flows. External partners should also recognize the political role of local governments as a focal point for the engagement of other local stakeholders in monitoring processes. Harmonization among bilateral and multilateral development cooperation partners with respect to approaches to strengthen local development planning, implementation and review would also enable subnational actors to assume an active role in the multi-level monitoring for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

National governments can similarly enable local authorities to advance development cooperation monitoring and review, in the first instance by acknowledging how local governments can contribute to the definition of development priorities, revenue management, and program and project implementation as part of an integrated country-level system where different levels of government display a clear division of labor and pursue mutually reinforcing sustainable development strategies. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution concerning the optimal design of political systems, the transfer of responsibilities to local governments in the context of decentralization can provide an avenue for strengthening vertical accountability in cooperation programs, provided that reforms are accompanied by capacity-strengthening measures for local authorities.

Repeating the caveat that the universe of local authorities is large and heterogeneous, local authorities themselves may not naturally be in a position to advance more effective monitoring of development cooperation at local level given limitations with respect to administrative efficiency, inclusiveness, or corruption. Where monitoring capacities do exist, they may be underutilized, indicating the potential of local governments themselves to further integrate monitoring activities into their work agendas. As limited local government engagement on monitoring may be a question of prioritization rather than a question of administrative capacity, future analysis of this topic can consider how monitoring competencies can best be housed within local administrations.

As experiences with decentralized development cooperation suggest, the systematic networking and exchange of best practices among local authorities within countries and regions and across the world is an important mechanism for encouraging governments to improve performance, identify relevant peers, and bring to light opportunities for collaboration to address common challenges. Examples of platforms bringing together local governments can be found at national, subregional, regional, and global levels.²⁴ While the focus of such platforms is knowledge sharing related to core local government functions, strengthening national and international knowledge platforms for local actors can provide a vehicle for articulating the case for enhancing locally-anchored development cooperation approaches vis-à-vis national governments and external partners. Such initiatives can help to more fully mobilize the potential of subnational governments and other local actors in

²⁴ Within Africa, the South African Local Government Association, the East African Local Government Association, and UCLG Africa Section provide examples.

the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda, as local actors should be the core driving force in identifying current obstacles to expanding the local dimension of development cooperation planning, implementation, monitoring and review and proposals to address these challenges.

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DCF Secretariat

Development Cooperation Policy Branch
Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UN Secretariat Building, 25th floor
New York, NY 10017

Email: dcf@un.org

Website: www.un.org/ecosoc/dcf

