**Local Government Associations (LGAs) and TALD**

**Evolving roles and added value of LGAs**

In the course of the last century, the number of Local Government Associations (LGAs) at national, regional and global level has continued to grow while their functions have become increasingly sophisticated. Over time, LGAs around the world have been taking different roles of a political and technical nature. They now act as:

* documentation and information clearinghouses;
* vehicles for exchange of experiences among members on local government issues and practices;
* lobbyists for local governments’ interests with central authorities[[1]](#footnote-1);
* providers of a diversified range of policy, legal and technical advisory services to their members.

In recent years, they have increasingly sought to influence the planning and implementation of external aid programs in support of their members’ capacity and initiatives by:

* insisting on a greater representation of Local Governments’ views and interests, in national-level processes of external aid programming;
* acting as intermediary and facilitators of technical and financial aid flows through ‘decentralized cooperation’ partnerships between LGs from developed and developing countries;
* playing a more active and direct role in the design and implementation of externally financed programs to build LG capacity.

All this implies that LGAs may have a critical role to facilitate the emergence of “developmental” local governments worldwide, both by (i) advocating and sustaining the momentum of decentralization reforms and (ii) building the capacity of their members to adopt good local governance practices and promote territorial development.

Over the past decade, the international development community increasingly recognised the potential of LGAs at various levels. At the EU level a similar trend can be observed, resulting in the recent conclusion of *“strategic partnerships”* with key LGAs (particularly at global and regional levels) as explained in the Box below.

|  |
| --- |
| ***Box 3.4: EU strategic partnerships with LGAs***  This is a novelty arising directly from the 2013 EU Communication regarding the empowerment of LAs. It led DG DEVCO to negotiate Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) as modality to establish political and long-term partnership as well as to channel financial support to LGAs integrated in their won priorities and processes. In a first phase, five FPAs were signed for the period 2015-2020 with three international LGAs[[2]](#footnote-2) and two regional structures[[3]](#footnote-3). They involve substantial funding geared at enabling the associations/members as development actors and representative policy interlocutors at global and regional levels. The beneficiaries were selected on the basis of their *de jure* and *de facto* monopoly and of their exclusive competence in the field of activity to which EU support relates.  The potential added value of such FPA (beyond institutional and capacity development objectives) for the EU is multiple: (i) long-term collaborative arrangements based on mutual interests and objectives; (ii) existence of a comprehensive policy vision that could be implemented by several EU-funded actions through different cooperation instruments; (iii) more structured dialogue and cooperation between LGAs and the EU.  Political and operational results of the FPA will be monitored and evaluated though a Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism that has been put in place by DGVCO B2 with the support of external experts. |

**Limitations affecting LGA’s ability to promote developmental local authorities**

The **added value of LGAs inevitably varies from country to country**. There are significant, sometime dramatic, differences in mandate, structures and capacities, reflecting variations in both the advances of decentralisation reforms and the nature of LAs they created in any given country. As a general rule, the ability of LGAs to provide services, act as independent advocate of their members’ interest and speak with credibility on their behalf, depends on the extent to which LAs (i) are recognised as an autonomous sphere of government within the national state and (ii) have the executive and administrative capacity to function as such. It follows that effective and capable LGA often are not found precisely where they would be most needed, i.e. where decentralization is stuck at an embryonic stage and local governments do not yet play any meaningful developmental role.

Besides the constraints imposed by the national decentralization policy, LGA often face also other internal and external limitations.

The first limitation refers to the **quality** of their **internal governance** and the extent to which this is affected by short-term partisan goals or supports the long-term interests of the local government sector at large. As national political parties either control, or compete to control, the LGAs, they often tend to make the greatest possible ‘political use’ of them. This reduces the LGAs’ ability to act as a unified voice of local authorities of different political colors and turns them into either ‘transmission belts’ of the ruling party’s policies, or tools of opposition politics. Their credibility as advocates of local governments’ empowerment, and of institutional reforms for decentralized development management, is then seriously compromised.

Ideally, LGAS provide a kind of a **“mirror”** which they could look into, to recognize and address the internal obstacles (of leadership and capacity) that prevent them from claiming and performing their developmental role. Too often, where local authorities do not play such role, it tends to be blamed on poor decentralization reforms. But this by no means the entire story. What is needed are more confident and more responsible local governments, which, while fighting for greater autonomy and an enabling decentralization policy, do **not hide behind the limitations of the environment and proactively embrace their developmental role, making the most of any given situation**. This challenge was well-captured in the “Freeport Declaration” issued at the conclusion of the 2009 conference of the Commonwealth Local Governments Forum (CLGF) which calls upon LAs and their associations to adopt  *“a business un-usual approach, which speaks of confidence, opportunity and innovation rather than helplessness, is needed; a shift towards a ‘developmental’ model, with clear strategic vision and leadership, that focuses on what needs to be done rather than on systems and structures”.*

The **second limitation** refers to the often **marginal place** in which **LGA** are kept by external **aid providers**, who tend to negotiate their support to DLGTD with central governments, ‘bypassing’ the LGAs in the process.

**How can LGAs foster developmental LAs that engage in territorial development?**

How then, Local Government Associations (LGA) can contribute to the emergence of these more confident and more responsible local governments? Action appears to be needed in four areas.

* **Recognizing the** **specificity of ‘Territorial Development’** (as an endogenous, incremental, spatially integrated and multi-scalar process) and its relation to national/global development efforts (including the pursuit of the SDG). A focus on territorial development could change the way in which LGAs interact with national governments, whereby the attention could indeed shift to *“…what needs to be done rather than systems and structures…”*.
* **Advocating the role of LG in managing territorial development** in terms of mobilization of additional resources and related need for *local autonomy* -without which, neither public expenditures efficiency gains, nor additional resources mobilization are likely to materialize. Greater emphasis could be put on (i) expanding and supporting autonomous Local Governments action under their *general mandate*; (ii) developing appropriate forms of inter-governmental cooperation and sharing of responsibilities for planning and services delivery; (iii) documenting successes in promoting territorial development by LAs (e.g. on *how* to build and mobilize social capital, facilitate active citizenship or bring additional private and community resources to bear on improved local services delivery and local economic development).
* **Raising the awareness and strengthening capacities of LAs** to provide leadership and act as a catalyst of territorial development. This goes beyond building competencies required to manage a LA organization. It includes creating a strong sense of institutional identity and common purpose for the entire local government system of a country, one that transcends partisan allegiances.
* **Partnering with aid agencies** to promote the TALD. LGAs can do this by systematically voicing LA concerns in national-level policy and political dialogue processes[[4]](#footnote-4) and by offering new and complementary channels for external aid directed to support the emergence of developmental LAs[[5]](#footnote-5).

|  |
| --- |
| ***Box 3.5 Examples of good LGA practices in support of developmental LAs and territorial development***  LGAs across the developing world have taken steps to effectively assume their dual role (advocacy and capacity support) in support of developmental LAs and territorial development. The following examples illustrate this potential:   * The Uganda Local Governments Association (ULGA) has been advocating for an improvement in the budget allocation to LAs since something 2001/2002, focusing on issues such as the development of various sector grant allocation formula, local revenue enhancing strategies, the timely release of funds or the ability of LAs to retain committed unspent balances (so as to pay service providers especially where annual funds arrive late and/or towards the end of the financial year). On the capacity side, it has trained elected authorities in drafting bylaws in order to promote local economic development and regulate environmental issues under their sphere of responsibility. * The ‘Association des Municipalités du Mali’ (AMM) is lobbying for the inclusion of communes as developmental actors within the peace agreement. This is crucial consideringpeace relies heavily on effective (fiscal) decentralisation and inclusion processes as part of the so-called re-foundation of the Malian State. The main political objective of the AMM is to highlight the political position of the Communes as important actors for the development (if endowed with the necessary resources) and vehicles for the pacification of the country * The Association of Urban and Rural Municipalities in El Salvador (COMURES) has been incorporated within the fiscal transfer systems and gets annually a budget of around 500,000 USD from the national government with the exclusive mandate to conduct capacity building activities amongst its members. * The Rwandan Association of Local Governments (RALGA) has evolved from a donor-dependent organisation with limited support from members (in 2008) to a solid, professional organisation, recognized by Government as a policy interlocutor and enjoying financial independence through membership contributions. It provides the following services: i) staff recruitment for LAs through sophisticated and objective assessment aligned to national laws; ii) land management; iii) formulation of plans and strategies for local economic development; and iv) the promotion of Public Private Partnerships. It seeks to reach out to LAs in East Africa with training and consultancy services. |

1. LGAs are confronted with a broad advocacy agenda in relation to decentralization reforms or wider national policy-making processes that affect them. These may relate to local democracy issues (e.g. electoral laws and practices); the intergovernmental system for cooperation between tiers of governments (e.g. the implementation of exclusive, shared and delegated competences) and related fiscal rules; the jurisdictional boundaries, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Including United Cities and Local Governments - World Secretariat (UCLG); the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) and the Association International des Maires Francophones (AIMF). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Involving the United Cities and Local Governments - Africa (UCLG-A) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and PLATFORMA. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. To articulate an autonomous and non-partisan LA viewpoint on national poverty reductions strategies, decentralization agendas and adequate approaches for providing donor support in ways that respect the role and added value of LAs. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Much remains to be done to coordinate *decentralized cooperation* activities in a way that is responsive to actual needs, adds real value and supports national reform processes. LGAs could furthermore position themselves as an effective channel for and facilitator of capacity development programs directed towards LAs (to ensure a proper match between demand and supply). In order to avoid the risk of overloading LGA with aid delivery tasks, some unconditional budget support could be provided, where necessary, that would enable LGA to pursue their core advocacy mandate. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)