



Helen Clark's speech at the Commonwealth Local Government Conference 2013

Thursday 16 May 2013

“Local government's role in helping achieve development goals”

Thank you for inviting me to participate in the Commonwealth Local Government Conference once again. I acknowledge the Co-chairs, Honourable Adolf Mwesige, Ugandan Minister of Local Government, and Mayor Lawrence Yule, Chairperson of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, for their leadership of the Conference, and Carl Wright, Secretary-General of the Forum and his team for their ongoing work to support developing the capacities of local government.

UNDP welcomes the work of the *Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Leaders for Post 2015* to promote the role of local government in implementing and designing the future global development agenda. Today's session is an opportunity to build on the work of the Taskforce, and for the members of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum to participate directly in the dialogue about the post-2015 development agenda and the shaping of sustainable development goals.

In my speech today, I will address local government's development role, the part it plays in achieving development goals – including the MDGs, and the importance of bringing local government perspectives to the debate about a renewed global development agenda.

UNDP places great importance on the role of local government as a key partner in the fight against poverty, achieving the MDGs, and advancing sustainable human development. We observe that the success of any development agenda depends on the ownership taken and leadership generated at both the national and the local levels. An understanding of this must be factored in to the post-2015 agenda and implementation of new goals and targets.

Local governments with clear mandates, adequate financing, and sufficient capacity help drive development. Your convening power is used to bring public, private, and non-governmental stakeholders together. You are a critical interface with other tiers of government. You have vital roles to play in planning for economic development at the local level and often for service delivery in a number of critical social sectors such as health, education, and housing. These strengths and attributes have been important to MDG achievement, and they will be vital to implementation of new goals and targets too.

UNDP and its associated programme, the UN Capital Development Fund, strongly support the CGLF's objective to maximize the potential of local government for development. In recent years we have been able to formalize our partnership and join forces to help build local government capacity to that end - for example, in empowering women in the Asia-Pacific region to run for local office and be effective as elected representatives.

Three years ago, with support from the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, Uganda hosted the UN Global Forum on Local Development with UNDP and UNCDF. The outcome of that



meeting was a call for action to “empower local governments and their associations to fully realise their potential as key agents of change and development”.

Since then, this call has been echoed in other key global development fora.

For example, at the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development last June, Member States highlighted the important role of local government in:

- engaging citizens in decision-making,
- helping to deliver results shaped by local realities, and
- taking integrated problem-solving approaches.

They also acknowledged that co-operation between local governments was becoming an increasingly important way to share practical lessons and advance proven development solutions.

Similar messages emerged from the UN Development Co-operation Forum last year in New York, and at the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Korea 2011 where it was agreed that development actors should “work more closely with local authorities to prepare, implement, and monitor development strategies.”

Getting the importance of local government recognised in such high level discussions matters. It means that when UN Member States come to determine what the renewed global development agenda and sustainable development goals will be, the important role of local government in driving development should be affirmed. That empowers local government.

"Localising the MDGs": Why local actors are essential to achieving the MDGs

Launched in 2000, the MDGs mobilised the international community around common goals. The MDGs were set as global targets, and were considered feasible at that level. When translated to the national level, however, some developing countries had surpassed many of the targets at the time of their launch, while others are still achieving few twelve years later.

Progress measured at the global level does disguise wide-disparities – both between countries and within them. For example, by 2010 the world is estimated to have met the MDG target to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty. This was largely due to the exceptional progress in just one very large country China. Some countries, however, have seen little reduction in their extreme poverty rate. Many have seen progress at the national level, but large inequities across regions and demographic groups remain.

As early as 2002, UNDP began to work with local governments to “localize the MDGs” in order to stimulate action on the ground. That included adjusting the global targets, higher or lower, to reflect what could be achieved locally.

We have worked with many local leaders who saw the opportunity represented by the MDGs and were keen to apply them to their areas. The drive to achieve the MDGs led to improvements in local data collection, enabling the needs of marginalised communities to be revealed and then targeted.

Some global MDG-related campaigns worked through systems of local government to expand immunization, healthcare, and HIV-prevention. A good example is the work of the Alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders on HIV and AIDS at the Local Level (AMICAALL) in Africa. Some 1500 mayors associated with this initiative in thirteen countries have played a very important role in



reducing rates of HIV significantly.

Localization of the MDGs has helped achieve their targets in three main ways.

- First, it has encouraged the different levels of government to work together to improve service delivery.

In Pakistan, for example, the strengthening of co-operation between central, regional, and local government through the Orangi Pilot Project led to improved water and sanitation for close to 100,000 families. The result was a fall in infant mortality rates in the area from the 130 deaths per 1,000 live births of the early 1980s to fewer than forty deaths per 1,000 by 2006.

In Africa and the Asia Pacific, local governments have worked with sector ministries and development partners to give families incentives to send their children, particularly girls, to school. These incentives, which included providing free basic schooling and transport to it, along with school feeding programmes, have helped lift school attendance (PDF).

In a number of countries, local governments in partnership with civil society groups have been examining and analysing the different impact which development initiatives and policies have on women and men. They have then used the results to target and shape better policy, helping their countries make significant strides towards MDG 3 on gender equality (PDF).

- Second, localising the MDGs has helped engage citizens and mobilised them to participate in development. Tailoring the MDGs to local conditions has made them more relevant to local people and thereby increased ownership of them.

An example: the government of the Kukes region of Albania used MDG messages on local radio and posters to engage citizens in designing their MDG-based development strategy (PDF). The process generated citizen support and greater involvement from central government and development partners in these efforts (PDF).

- Third, MDG localisation helped national governments address the inequalities holding back achievement of MDG targets. The Government of the Philippines, for example, worked with local governments to make the MDGs the focus of regional development plans and investment schemes and seventeen sub-national MDG progress reports were produced, helping the Philippines address geographic disparities in MDG progress (2007 MDGR, p. 68, Box 7).

Overcoming gaps and growing challenges

Despite significant MDG successes and high economic growth rates in a number of developing countries, many people and communities have yet to see the benefits. In 2010, close to half the population of sub-Saharan Africa still lived on under \$1.25 per day. Inequalities and pockets of poverty are still evident in many of the world's middle income countries.

The role of local governments is critical to reaching those left behind, including women, indigenous people, ethnic minorities, people living in remote areas, youth, the disabled, and other excluded groups. Yet both limited capacity and limited authority to generate revenue may make it difficult for many local governments to translate global and national goals into local action. Many may also lack access to the data and evidence needed to guide effective MDG action.

UNDP is working with central and local governments to accelerate MDG progress, including by



applying the MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF) at the local level.

The MAF works by bringing a wide range of stakeholders together to identify the bottlenecks in the way of MDG progress, and to devise pragmatic solutions. This includes addressing bottlenecks at local levels and targeting support to disadvantaged communities and groups.

Colombia, for example, is applying the MDG Acceleration Framework in 76 of its poorest territories, departments, and municipalities. Local authorities and stakeholders there are defining their own MDG Acceleration Action Plans, which reflect local priorities for reducing poverty, advancing gender equality, and addressing health service and other deficiencies. With the support of development partners and the central government, many are now implementing their action plans, raising the prospects of Colombia achieving more MDG targets.

Another example of work through the MAF: UNDP and UNCDF have been working in Laos to address capacity constraints in local government so that the needs of disadvantaged groups in remote communities can be met.

Applying the Acceleration Framework has confirmed for UNDP that when local and national actors work together to solve problems they will identify solutions to implementation and delivery bottlenecks which might otherwise have remained invisible. Collaboration works.

Through support for decentralisation of central government functions, UNDP and UNCDF can also help build the development effectiveness of local government. But where authority is devolved, local governments need capacity and resources. It helps to be transparent and accountable too. Local governments need the capacity to budget effectively, and to deliver results and report on them.

We have also supported co-operation between local governments across countries, including through the ART programme, which has linked local and sub-national governments in developing countries with their peers in developed countries. I saw this in action in Morocco on a visit last year – in just one of the more than 600 sub-regions and municipalities in nineteen countries benefiting from decentralised co-operation.

Towards a Post-2015 Global Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals

Looking forward, local government's role in accelerating achievement on the MDGs through the end of 2015 is critical, and so is its participation in shaping the future global development agenda.

Momentum is building for a post-2015 agenda which can lead to the eradication of extreme poverty, tackle inequalities, and put the world on a sustainable path which does not wreck the ecosystems on which we all depend. These ambitions won't be realized without the full involvement of local government.

This session today is one of a great many consultations facilitated by the UN about the shape of the future development agenda. Close to 100 national consultations have taken place - or will soon, along with those on eleven major themes from governance to inequalities, environment, education, health, and other key issues.

Themes emerging from the consultations to date include:

- People want the unfinished business of the MDGs to stay high on the global agenda- there is still a lot to do.



- People want a focus not only on quantitative targets, but also on quality. It's not just the number of children in schools which matters, but also whether they are learning anything while in school.
- Marginalised groups are demanding visibility, rightly pointing out that aggregate data often disguises inequalities.
- There is a groundswell for honest and effective governance to be recognised as a critical driver of development.

A consensus is emerging on the need to have just one global development agenda aimed at achieving poverty eradication within the context of sustainable development. This can combine the unfinished MDG business with a transformational sustainable development agenda as envisaged at Rio +20. We need to see higher human development and maintaining ecosystem integrity as entirely compatible objectives. Green and inclusive economies and societies can deliver both.

Many local governments have long been leaders in holistic approaches to sustainable development. Mayors from my country and around the world were inspired by the 1992 Earth Summit's Agenda 21 to take action locally.

My hope is that a renewed global development agenda will inspire a new generation of local and national leaders to act to build a more peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world.

The place of governance in a renewed development agenda

Experience with the MDGs suggests that corrupt and/or weak governance is a serious obstacle to broad-based development. Countries and communities with the least MDG achievement also often face violence and armed conflict – often exacerbated in turn by poor governance.

In the on-going global My World survey on priorities for the renewed development agenda, honest, responsive, and accountable government has ranked very high on people's priorities. Elsewhere, some are calling for a stand-alone global goal on governance. Parliamentarians, in a global survey, expressed a strong preference for such a global goal to boost participation, transparency, and integrity in public institutions.

Measuring governance is not an easy task. I understand that this meeting will discuss this topic shortly, and I will be very interested to hear your views. Feedback from consultations to date has suggested a range of possible goals and targets around governance including the following:

- A target to close the gap in representation of men and women at all levels of elected government.
- A goal expressing zero tolerance for corruption. That would be challenging to measure, but could focus on indicators for budget transparency and citizen access to information.
- A target incentivizing greater local level reporting on development progress to citizens. That would spur both better data collection and greater transparency.
- A global goal on inclusive, productive, green and resilient cities, stressing the need to improve the governance and resilience of the world's rapidly expanding urban areas.
- A global goal on the rule of law, with a target aimed at the provision of a free legal identity to all citizens. That would provide a better basis from which to claim rights, settle disputes, register a business, and open a bank account.

Where from here?

- Last year, the UN Secretary-General appointed a High Level Panel to advise him on the on Post-2015 agenda. Its report is expected at the end of this month.



- A High Level Meeting on the MDGs will be held at the UN General Assembly in September. It will focus on both MDG progress and on what follows.
- Rio+20 called on the UN General Assembly to establish an Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. It will report by September 2014.
- Thereafter it is expected that UN Member States will negotiate what the renewed global development agenda will look like, with a view to affirming that at a high level UN meeting in the Spring of 2015.

Thus this process still has some two years to run. It is vital that local government stays engaged and is heard throughout. Having the recommendations of this discussion presented to the Commonwealth Heads of Government later this year will be very important, as it is the governments of UN Member States who will take the decisions on the new agenda.

The need to localise the global development agenda is no longer contested. As ministers in charge of local government and decentralisation, representatives of local government and of associations of local authorities, participants here are champions of turning people's aspirations for a more prosperous, equitable, and sustainable world into reality. I wish you all well in your development work and in making your voice heard on the role local government can play.