
Decentralised cooperation in the context of the 2030 Agenda



IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

This document has been drafted at the request of the Committee of the Regions, for the Fifth Assises of Decentralised Cooperation (Brussels 10 and 11 July 2017). It offers an evaluation of the relevance of the fashionable yet understudied topic of decentralised cooperation in the context of the 'localisation' of the 2030 Agenda. To tackle that subject, we will first consider the rise of local authorities, through their associations – an institutional form of decentralised cooperation – as their voices are legitimate and should be heard in the international debate on development. We will then study the contributions that local authorities have made to the creation of the 2030 Agenda, which contains several goals that cover areas usually included within the jurisdiction of sub-national authorities. To conclude, the analysis will consider the European Union's support of local authorities as development stakeholders, specifically in decentralised cooperation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent decades, appreciation for sub-national authorities and decentralised cooperation has been growing, within international institutions and in the international aid effectiveness agenda. Although the concept of development cooperation has traditionally only been understood as a question of international relations in the classical sense (central governments in bilateral or multilateral arrangements), the definition has now widened to include a host of private and public organisations building broad partnerships. Local and regional authorities, working through their networks, actively took part in the creation of the 2030 Agenda. At the request of local authorities, the agenda contains a goal which is essentially local in nature, indeed each of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is, to varying extents, relevant at local level.

Although it is still small in terms of aid flows provided, decentralised cooperation could become an asset in the 'localisation' of the SDGs, without which the ambitious agenda might never come to fruition. The term 'localisation', which often crops up in current discussions, refers to the transformation of the SDGs into specific programmes tailored to local contexts, and brought about with the participation of a wide range of contributors. Localisation requires local governments to have the skills and financial means needed to plan and put into place measures, to give effect to those SDGs, which are highly credible among citizens. Peer apprenticeships can be used as professional training or support. The case studies included in this analysis have shown such apprenticeships to be an effective tool in building local government capacity.

The EU had already acted to create an operational and political framework to push local authorities to participate in development before the 2030 Agenda was set out. The European Commission supports capacity building in local authorities and good governance in partner countries, the participation of EU sub-national authorities in development awareness-raising and education campaigns, along with the creation of local-authority networks to boost their voices and coordinate their national, regional and international efforts. Apart from some specific programmes within geographical instruments, decentralised bilateral (south-south) or triangular (north-south-south) cooperation plays only an ancillary role in the European framework to promote local authority involvement in development. Given the potential of decentralised cooperation to lead to stable and mutually beneficial peer-partnerships, European support for decentralised cooperation centred around the SDGs should be strengthened, including through a dedicated programme to promote the local implementation of universal goals. The new European Consensus on Development, signed on 7 June 2017, is a solid political foundation for strengthened EU action in this area. It contains an explicit commitment by Member States and EU institutions to support local governments, especially through decentralised cooperation, where the Consensus recognises that the achievement of the SDGs will largely depend on sub-national authorities.

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List of main acronyms used

ACP:	African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
DAC:	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DCI:	Development Cooperation Instrument
EDF:	European Development Fund
ENI:	European Neighbourhood Instrument
MDGs:	Millennium Development Goals
NGO:	Non-governmental organisation
NSA-LA:	The Non-State Actors and Local Authorities thematic programme
ODA:	Official Development Assistance
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
UN:	United Nations
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme

1. European cities and regions increasingly taking part in a changing development cooperation scene

The inclusion of the Sustainable Development Goals in the new European Consensus on Development¹ and the acceleration of their roll-out will be a feature of 2017 at European and world level. The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, a key player in the monitoring of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, will host a meeting of heads of state and government in New York from 10 to 19 July 2017. At European level, the two key communications published in November 2016 by the European Commission on the next steps for a sustainable European future² and proposal for a new European Consensus on Development³ lay the groundwork for the inclusion of the SDGs in both EU domestic and foreign policies. The adoption of the new European Consensus on Development in June 2017 is also an important milestone. In this context the question arises of how decentralised cooperation can contribute to accomplishing the new development agenda in the local implementation of the new global goals.

An increase in funding sources is one of the drivers reshaping the structure of international development cooperation. That increase is welcome in a context of widespread budget constraints, which is resulting in deep changes to the way that development cooperation relationships are built (and rebuilt). Traditional protagonists such as Member State government agencies on the Development Aid Committee (DAC) of the OECD and international institutions are now flanked by emerging countries (with their own views on cooperation based on mutual interest), private philanthropic foundations and hybrid institutions which bring together private and public funds under various banners (alliances, forums, funds or partnerships). The emergence of sub-

¹ [‘The Council adopts a new European consensus on development’](#), Council of the EU, 19 May 2017.

² [COM\(2016\) 0739](#).

³ [COM\(2016\) 740](#).

national authorities on the international stage, pushed by globalisation, is proof of the erosion of the nearly monopolistic position that governments have historically held in foreign relations.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,⁴ adopted in 2015 at the UN summit, takes into account the many changes in development cooperation, and is visionary when it comes to its goals. It is comprehensive in scope. The 2030 Agenda comprises 17 goals, which combine socioeconomic and environmental aspects, and all the while recognise that sustainable development can only be achieved through peace and security and by upholding human rights. Experts agree that the ambitious agenda will remain but a pipe dream unless it is backed and put into effect by authorities at all levels (global, national and local). This has led some observers to imagine ‘multilevel government with universal goals’.⁵

2. Decentralised cooperation: all shapes and sizes

2.1. The features of decentralised cooperation

Decentralised cooperation was born in the shape of town twinning at the end of the Second World War, as part of Franco-German reconciliation, but has taken off only in recent decades. European local authorities (in various forms: cities, regions or federal states⁶) are ever more active internationally, in what some call ‘city diplomacy’⁷ and in development cooperation, including decentralised cooperation.⁸

Decentralised cooperation wraps together contrasting realities to bring together a number of groups, which explains to some extent the fragmented information and statistical data available on the subject.⁹ Europe has more than 129 000 local authorities at municipal level, more than 1 400 at mid-level and more than 400 at regional level.¹⁰ The use of decentralised cooperation varies drastically from one country to another. In

⁴ [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

⁵ Statement by G. Herrera Villareal during [Round Table 1](#) of the 4th Assises of Decentralised Cooperation, Committee of the Regions 1 and 2 June 2015.

⁶ The term ‘local authorities’ is a commonly used generic expression to describe one of numerous public bodies, for which the name varies from one country to another: municipalities, cities, conurbations, provinces, and regions of federal states. Other equivalent terms used include: sub-national governments, territorial communities, sub-state or sub-national authorities. For more information, see: E. D. Zapata Garesche, [Internationalisation des villes et coopération décentralisée entre l’Union européenne et l’Amérique Latine](#), Study, Foreign and European Ministry, Government of France, p. 26 (in French).

⁷ R. Vand der Pluijm defines city diplomacy as ‘the institutions and processes by which cities engage in relationships with players on the international stage, with the intention of representing themselves and their interests’ in Y. Viltard, [Diplomatie des villes: collectivités territoriales et relations internationales](#), *Politique étrangère*, 2010/3, p.598 (in French).

⁸ Y. Viltard, op. cit.

⁹ No complete aggregate of data exists on the matter. Information that is available (in particular from the [Atlas of Decentralised Cooperation](#), a joint initiative of the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission) is based on voluntary statements from local authorities and case studies from a number of analyses. Many studies that are still in progress are expected to fill the data gap. One notable study overseen by the [OECD](#) is expected to bear results at the beginning of 2018. The study will complement and update a similar study published in 2005 by the OECD, [Aid Extended by Local and State Governments](#) DAC Journal 2005, Vol. 6, No. 4.

¹⁰ [Local and Regional Governments in Europe: Structures and Competences](#) CCRE-CEMR, 2016, p.3.

Spain, one of the ‘champions’ of decentralised cooperation, alongside France, Germany, and Belgium, 11 %¹¹ of development aid comes from local authorities, but countries such as Greece, Ireland and the United Kingdom have not developed a culture of decentralised cooperation.

Whether direct (bilateral and multilateral) or indirect (through NGOs), these relationships may take the form of classic town-twinning, training, joint projects or technical assistance, through to multi-level partnerships intended to influence the international political agenda (See Table 1). Beyond bilateral relations, territorial authorities are joining multiple international networks bringing together local authorities and/or their associations to share experience on common issues, and to further weigh in on the political agenda at international level. That was the case for the 2030 Agenda, which is a sizeable issue for sub-national actors.

Table 1 – Examples of types of decentralised cooperation¹²

Type	Examples
North-south bilateral city partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long-term partnership between Lyon and Ouagadougou which includes technical collaboration between the two cities’ services, financial support, equipment delivery, and national and European financial support. - Partnership between León (Nicaragua) and Utrecht (Netherlands) focused on capacity building in social housing in León.
Bilateral partnerships between cities with the same characteristics and/or complementary interests	Partnerships between ‘sister cities’ Rotterdam and Shanghai: cooperation, for mutual interest, in logistics and services, which has widened to include exchanges in the areas of education, arts and construction.
Bilateral partnership between national associations - support for local government	Support from the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments for the hosting of a Moldovan local authority congress created in 2010.
North-south-south triangular partnerships	Bojanala Paltinium (South Africa), Ho (Ghana), Lahti (Finland): cooperation in environmental services (water and waste management) through Finnish funding and reciprocal apprenticeships.
Multilateral theme-based partnerships	The Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (nrg4SD), established in 2002, groups 50 federal states and regional governments and 7 federal state and region associations together to promote – particularly through expertise exchanges – partnerships and projects between its members, sustainable development, and the recognition of the contribution of sub-national governments at international level.

¹¹ The Commission's communication, ‘Local authorities: actors for development’, (COM(2008) 629 final) states 15 % for Spain. According to the data collected during a workshop on decentralised cooperation held by the OECD in Brussels on the 9 June 2017, the percentage fell to 11 % in 2015.

¹² Table based primarily upon case studies included in Decentralised Cooperation for Development – European Perspectives, [Platforma](#), 2010.

Multilateral institutionalised partnerships/ 'network of networks'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Platforma: European platform for local and regional authorities for development. The majority of the 34 members are national, European, and international associations. Platforma tries to coordinate positions to lobby the EU institutions, to be a space to share experiences and promote decentralised cooperation. - United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG): a network created in 2004 through the merging of two large local government federations (IULA and FMCU). It now comprises 240 000 cities and regions and 175 local and regional government associations and its principle goal is to represent those associations on the international stage.
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The concept is still evolving, with no consensus at European or international level on a definition of decentralised cooperation. The European Commission includes civil society groups in its definition of decentralised cooperation, whilst the most widely acknowledged definition covers only cooperation between the local authorities of different countries. A wider definition covers all local or regional policy in development cooperation.¹³

Although it often involves fund transfers, decentralised cooperation implies more horizontal relationships than those of classic development aid (see Table 2). The notions of reciprocity and mutual interest carry more weight.¹⁴ Decentralised cooperation relationships are often built up over long periods of time, and become ever stronger partnerships between authorities where interactions and experience- and knowledge-sharing moves in two directions, or three for triangular partnerships.

Table 2 – Decentralised Cooperation: a mechanism adapted to the new paradigm of cooperation and development

<i>The old paradigm</i>	<i>The new paradigm and decentralised cooperation</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor/beneficiary country relationship • Focus on financial aid • Dominant philanthropic motives • (Inter)state governance • Central governments play role key • Sectorial silo approach • South-specific objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-partner relationships • Focus on developing capabilities • Shared interests • Multi-level governance • Inclusive multi-level partnerships • Integrated approach • Common goals

¹³ A. Fernandez de Losada Passolos, Shaping a new generation of decentralized cooperation for enhanced effectiveness and accountability, CPMR, Platforma, July 2017.

¹⁴ E.D. Zapata Garesche, [Internationalisation des villes et coopération décentralisée entre l'Union européenne et l'Amérique Latine](#), Study, French Foreign and European Ministry, French Government, pp 26 and 100- 110.

2.2. Case studies

2.2.1. Long-term partnership between Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) and Lyon (France)

Cooperation between Ouagadougou and Lyon started in 1993 and now constitutes a long-term partnership. It is based on three-yearly conventions which have steadily increased the number of sectors covered, including:

- **Sanitation:** waste management was one of the first areas of cooperation. Starting in 1994, refurbished waste-collection vehicles and skips were sent, personnel trained in on-site workshops, with equipment also provided, and in 2003 a training centre was set up. The training centre was inspired by Greater Lyon's 'cleanliness academy' and has become a training centre for all the large cities in French-speaking Africa. Since 2007, it has been backed by the *African Capacity Building Foundation*,¹⁵
- **Town planning:** Lyon's town-planning agency has been involved in town planning in Ouagadougou since 2007, specifically by providing technical assistance in the creation of a land-use plan;
- **Water management:** in 2006 the French development agency agreed to provide €15 million to Ouagadougou to extend the water supply to outlying neighbourhoods; Greater Lyon project-managed the work and posted one of their engineers on site for three years. They were in charge technically and financially of the implementation of the programme;
- **Supporting economic cooperation:** In 2011 the first mission of the Lyon Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the French Mouvement des entreprises went to Ouagadougou to develop commercial relations between the two territories.

Subsequent evaluations have led to the identification of several strong points in cooperation between the two cities, specifically the closer ties between the municipal technical services, the transfer of skills, the boost to the expertise of everyone involved, and the ease of access to international funding (especially EU funding) which Ouagadougou has benefited from thanks to support from Lyon.¹⁶

The conditions for successful decentralised cooperation are evident in the Lyon case. Strong political will on both sides, a set schedule, creating shared projects, capacity-building actions geared towards groups, access to funding, and the appreciation of the personnel involved in the cooperation.

But the case also brings obstacles to light. At the beginning of the relationship it was not clear that it was truly a shared project, given that, owing to its paucity of resources, the southern partner regularly sought material and/or financial aid. Trust is built over time and by establishing personal relationships, and trust is a powerful driver of cooperation. Another difficulty arises when personnel called upon for the cooperation lack international experience: they tend to want to 'cut and paste' the solution that they already know, without tailoring it sufficiently to the partner city. The trouble with submitting and defending funding proposals to large donors, and coordinating a number of funding streams whilst bearing in mind the specific demands of each donor is cited as another problem.

¹⁵ E. Arnou & M. Barnaud, [Retour sur l'expérience de coopération décentralisée du Grand Lyon et de la Ville de Lyon Rapport de capitalisation](#), Institutions and Development, May 2012 (in French).

¹⁶ [Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, Action internationale de Lyon](#), The City of Greater Lyon, 2012 (in French).

2.2.2. Innovation in sustainable territorial partnerships (I-STEPS)

This UNDP initiative supports opportunities for exchange between local authorities from the north and the south. Since 2014 the local authorities of Barcelona, Bilbao, Milan and the Basque Country have carried out several joint projects together with provincial governments in Ecuador, Colombia and Lebanon.

On the first business visits to Ecuador of representatives of European sub-national authorities during 2014, the participants created a list of priorities and common interests for socioeconomic transformation. Several axes of action were labelled as priorities, which led to the 2015 and 2016 running of training and capacity-building activities, and to the development of north-south-south triangular exchanges.¹⁷ Those activities enable the I-STEPS partners' resources to be tailored to local needs, including skills, technical support and funds to drive home-grown development. In Ecuador, the actions launched helped to change production methods and consumption patterns, resulting in a fairer distribution of wealth. In Lebanon, water access was improved for the vulnerable population against the difficult backdrop of the migration crisis. Experiences are evaluated and best practices are used systematically to help knowledge-exchange with other partners and contribute to the implementation of the SDGs at all levels. The partnership also brings advantages for the European partners who, by working with counterparts in the north and the south, can use their specialisations and rethink their own methods.

3. Growing trust among local and regional authorities of the international development architecture

In recent decades, territorial authorities have been steadily credited as legitimate players in international development. They are most prominent on the sidelines of UN-Habitat, the UN programme responsible for defining and overseeing urban development at global level. Despite the reticence of some countries, for which the international independence of regions and cities poses challenges on the domestic political scene, the demands of sub-national authorities grouped together in a number of networks have borne fruit. They are ever more present at the UN, recognition of their role in the international agenda on aid effectiveness is spreading, and they increasingly participate in the creation of international agendas – in fact, they helped to draw up the SDG agenda.

3.1. Recognition within international institutions

The First World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments was held in 1996, just before the meeting of the United Nations Human Settlements Commission (the predecessor to UN-Habitat) in Istanbul. More than 500 mayors took part and called upon states to promote decentralisation, specifically by guaranteeing local authorities legal status and democratic legitimacy through elections to vote in their representatives.¹⁸ The international community was also called upon to recognise and support direct cooperation between cities within the framework of bilateral and multilateral development programmes. The First World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments also called for stronger international representation for local authorities

¹⁷ UNDP Brussels, [Joint initiative of UNDP and European cities and regions identifies cooperation opportunities with provinces and cities in Ecuador](#), May 2014.

¹⁸ [Final Declaration](#), United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities, Istanbul, 30-31 May 1996.

through the creation of a permanent structure to coordinate their actions at the UN. The result was the creation, two years later, of the United Nations Advisory Committee of Local Authorities. It was initially intended to represent local governments in the dialogue on the implementation of the UN-Habitat agenda, but the committee has become the representative of local governments in the UN system as a whole. The committee is supported in its work by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the largest local authority federation. That federation was one of the proponents of the creation in 2013 of the coordination mechanism for the regional and international networks of local authorities, the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments.

The Second World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments met in May 2016 to prepare for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III).¹⁹ In the declaration from the Assembly, local and regional governments from around the world welcomed the wider recognition received from UN governments of the status of sub-national governments.²⁰ The Assembly also highlighted the fact that the closing document of UN-Habitat III (Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All) adopted in October 2016 refers to the contribution of sub-national governments, including within the framework of the revision of the New Urban Agenda (Paragraph 169) and within the World Assembly for Local and Regional Governments (Paragraph 8). However, despite the efforts put in by the Global Taskforce, local authorities have not obtained the ‘special status’ that they requested from UN-Habitat. That status would differ from observer status in that it would enable them to join government representatives at the conference.²¹

Nonetheless, local and regional governments were able to participate in a joint hearing with national governments, part of preparations for UN-Habitat III. Despite low state participation, the meeting was hailed as historic in the sense that, for the first time in the UN framework, local and central governments met on a conspicuously equal footing.²²

The movement toward greater participation of local authorities in global governance is being continued with the formation of a Global Parliament of Mayors. The forum met in The Hague in November 2016, bringing together some 60 mayors from north and south. Its goal is to promote the right of cities to govern themselves (the concept of ‘city rights’) and collective city decision-making to tackle local problems with global causes, such as climate change and migration crises. Even if we accept the official declarations stating that the new institution wants to work ‘constructively and harmoniously’ with national governments, the comments of one of the founders, Benjamin Barber, seem to go much further. He considers the emergence of cities in global governance as a way to mitigate the failures of states, which are succumbing ever more to populism and insularity.²³

3.2. Considering the International Aid Effectiveness Agenda

The thinking in high-level international forums on the best way to maximise the impact of development cooperation on the ground is changing: awareness is rising of the importance of the local level, and, to a lesser extent, decentralised cooperation.

¹⁹ [Second World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments](#).

²⁰ [Declaration of the Second World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments](#), October 2016.

²¹ G. Scruggs, [Much at stake in final negotiating sessions before Habitat III](#), 22 July 2016.

²² G. Scruggs, [Cities clamour for a seat at the table of the U.N. countries club](#), Citiscope, 18 May 2016.

²³ B.R. Barber, [A Governance Alternative to Faltering Nation-States](#), Citylab, 5 December 2016.

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2 March 2005) is the cornerstone of the International Aid Effectiveness Agenda. It focuses on the relationship between donor countries and developing countries.²⁴ Local authorities go unmentioned in it. The declaration defines the reciprocal commitments of donor and developing countries in five pillars: ownership (by partner-country authorities), harmonisation (including through management procedures), alignment (of all actions concerning national strategies) managing for results (rather than processes or contributions) and mutual accountability.

The 2008 Accra Agenda for Action completes the Paris Declaration with the aim of speeding up its implementation.²⁵ One suggestion is to expand traditional partnerships between donor and developing countries. Given that new participants have surfaced in development cooperation (emerging countries, global funds, private foundations and civil society organisations (CSOs)), the Accra Agenda for Action duly notes the new challenges when it comes to improving the impact of cooperation on poverty reduction. Although local authorities have not yet been directly invited to take part in that new partnership, it is supposedly 'open to all', above all those who finance and bring about cooperation, and their role in the legitimisation of development processes is already recognised at partner-country level: in an effort to encourage every country to own its development process, local authorities – as is the case for parliaments, CSOs, the media and representatives of the private sector – are called upon to take part in national dialogue.

The Busan Partnership, which was approved during the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in December 2011 in South Korea, cements the central role of inclusive partnerships in development, and explicitly recognises the importance of local authorities given their close links to citizens and the fact that they provide key basic services.²⁶ One may note the quick application of the inclusive nature of the partnership: among the signatories that feature alongside governments and traditional international organisations are private foundations, private-sector organisations and the organisations of local-authority and federation representatives, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the World Forum of Regional Governments and Regional Associations (ORU Fogar).²⁷ Note also that UCLG has become a member of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation's Steering Committee, which was created to oversee its implementation.

The communique from the first high-level meeting of the new Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, held in Mexico in 2014, confirmed the role of local and regional governments in inclusive partnerships which foster development and promoted the creation of networks for knowledge-exchange between various public and private, national and regional organisations and authorities.²⁸

²⁴ [Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness](#), March 2005.

²⁵ [Accra Agenda for Action](#), 2008.

²⁶ [Busan Partnership](#), 2011.

²⁷ [Countries, Territories and Organizations Adhering to the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation](#), OECD.

²⁸ [First High-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation: Building Towards an Inclusive Post-2015 Development Agenda Mexico High Level Meeting Communique](#), 16 April 2014.

Lastly, the Nairobi outcome document from December 2016 contains a series of commitments to local governments, which are mentioned no fewer than 30 or so times. The document underscores the role that local governments can play to ensure transparency in the use of funds and, more than anything, to tighten links between governments and citizens, the private sector and NGOs. Therefore signatories committed to building local authority capacities to enable them to fulfil their duties effectively (specifically by supporting the management and harnessing of local funds, inclusive and sustainable land management and the development of basic services). They also committed to regularly including local authorities in consultations on national strategies to ensure coherence between government development plans and local schemes.²⁹

Of the initiatives taken through the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, two projects directly concern local governments.³⁰ The first, backed by UCLG and ORU, 'National road maps for local and regional governments' is intended to start national dialogues on road maps to bolster the contribution that local and regional authorities make to achieving the Busan commitments, starting in 10 priority countries.

The second initiative, supported by UCLG, the European Commission, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum and the International Association of Francophone Mayors is 'the role of local and regional governments in effective development'. It is intended to promote local and regional government involvement in multi-level, multi-member partnerships to feed a territorial approach to local development as a contribution to achieving the SDGs.

3.3. Contributing to the 2030 Agenda

Local authorities and organisations are highly aware of their growing international recognition and therefore took advantage of the openness and inclusiveness of the 2030 Agenda's preparatory process. From the outset they actively contributed to the drafting of the agenda, using the entire array of channels available to them.³¹

In preparation for the Rio +20 Conference, an urban summit was held in Rio on 18 June 2012, 250 local and regional government representatives presented their recommendations to the heads of state or government who would attend Rio +20 from 20-22 June 2012.³² One of the requests was for the creation of a new multi-level architecture in international governance; along with legal and financial mechanisms to enable sub-national governments to improve their service provision and foster sustainable urban development, a sustainable development goal specifically for cities was called for. That *stand-alone* urban goal was strongly backed by the Global Taskforce, and became SDG number 11 in the 2030 Agenda.

The inclusion of Kadir Topbaş, UCLG President and Mayor of Istanbul, on the panel of eminent personalities for the post-2015 agenda, set up by the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, was seen as a historic moment for the recognition of the essential role that

²⁹ [Global Partnership on Effective Development Cooperation commits to empower local governments to localize the SDGs](#), 2 December 2016. [Nairobi outcome document](#), 1 December 2016.

³⁰ [What are the Global Partnership Initiatives?](#), Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation.

³¹ M. Latek, [The post-2015 development agenda. An innovative process for a conservative outcome?](#), EPRS, European Parliament, July 2014.

³² UCLG, [Local and Regional Governments role in the Rio Outcome Document](#), an analysis by UCLG, June 2012.

local authorities play in global construction and partnerships.³³ The panel's report states that it is essential to localise the 2015 agenda and that local authorities must play an essential role in identifying priorities, putting plans into effect and working with the private sector.

Broad consultations took place during the summer of 2014 on the local implementation of the SDGs. It comprised 13 national dialogues, three global events and six regional events, with more than 5 200 participants. The results yielded underscore the importance of decentralisation, including on fiscal affairs, the principle of subsidiarity and good governance at all levels when it comes to putting the post-2015 development agenda into action.³⁴ It is also interesting to see more voices in favour of decentralised cooperation in a 'bottom-up' approach which fosters local ownership of development cooperation. Decentralised cooperation is the method of choice for bringing about the SDGs at local level, especially through best-practice exchanges and south-south cooperation. Suitable financial backing must also be provided for reciprocal learning initiatives between local actors.

UNDP ART

The global UNDP ART (Articulation of Territorial Networks, founded in 2005) focuses on local sustainable development by providing coordinated support for the decentralised cooperation of more than 600 partners, all in conformance with the Paris principles. One of its key goals is to localise the SDGs by taking a territorial approach to sustainable development, particularly through capacity-building in local governance and the building of broad partnerships.

4. Localising the 2030 Agenda: the role of decentralised cooperation

The term 'localisation', a key facet of multi-level governance, means the process of defining, bringing about and overseeing local strategies to achieve the SDGs at local, national and global levels.³⁵ In other words, localisation is the battery of instruments and mechanisms to sculpt the international sustainable development agenda into local results.

Localising the 2030 Agenda is more than simply a slogan – it is a practical necessity. Not only does its exhaustive, ambitious and integrated structure require all stakeholders to act, public and private alike, at all levels, but also – in the words of UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, during the Global Taskforce meeting of 28 May 2013 – 'all development is ultimately local'.³⁶

³³ Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, [Local and Regional Voices on the Global Stage. Our Post-2015 Journey](#), 2016, p.11.

³⁴ [Localizing the post-2015 development agenda](#), UNDP, 2015.

³⁵ UNDP ART [2015-2016 in Review](#), 24 April 2017, p.37.

³⁶ P.S. Reddy, [Localising the sustainable development goals \(SDGs\) The role of Local Government in context](#), African Journal of Public Affairs, Volume 9 number 2 June 2016, p.4.

4.1. Local dimensions in a global agenda

According to their declaration on 27 September 2015, following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, local and regional government representatives consider the inclusion of an urban objective a major step forward.³⁷

SDG 11 aims to ‘make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’ and is therefore eminently local insofar as it must be achieved primarily by municipal authorities. SDG 11 is by its very nature the local goal for which global implementation is crucial to the entire 2030 Agenda, given the scale of urbanisation and the challenges that it brings for sustainability. The goal is at the heart of the 2016 New Urban Agenda and includes measures in housing and basic services, transport and public spaces, environmental protection and resilience, and is designed to achieve inclusive, integrated sustainable urbanisation.

Each SDG has a local aspect which is vital to its success. Many of the 169 targets which comprise the SDGs have a particularly local scope:³⁸

- **SDG 1, ‘end poverty in all its forms everywhere’**, contains target 1.4, which provides for access to basic services such as water and sanitary services, which are often managed at local level. Local authorities are also on the frontline when it comes both to identifying people living in poverty within their jurisdictions and to creating solutions which will lift them out of it.
- **SDG 2, ‘end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition’**, also involves local authorities, which play a key role in land and water resource management – the foundation of food security, and in the creation of reliable supply chains.
- **SDG 3 seeks to ‘ensure healthy lives and promote well-being’**. Local authorities can contribute first of all by ensuring that their jurisdictions are clean and free from squalor, by guaranteeing access to water and sanitary facilities, and by taking measures to prevent road accidents and pollution in town planning or managing public transport.
- **SDG 4, ‘ensure inclusive and quality education’**, is often the duty of local authorities, especially for primary and secondary education. They are also best placed to recognise and overcome the particular challenges which hinder young people from staying in school.
- **SDG 5, ‘achieve gender equality’**, can be influenced at local level, in particular through the planning of urban public spaces, training local police about the prevention of violence against women and by adopting gender-equality policies in local administrations.
- **SDG 6, ‘ensure access to water and sanitation’**, as with the goal on basic services, is particularly important for local authorities, who often manage water and sanitation. Putting that goal into practice depends on the participation of locals: local policies could help to get more people involved.

³⁷ Statement delivered by representatives of local and regional government networks gathered around the Global Taskforce, [All SDGs are Local: Towards an Action Agenda in Habitat III](#), New York 27 September 2015.

³⁸ UCLG, [The sustainable development what local governments need to know](#), 2015; Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities, [Local support for global challenges](#), 2015.

- **SDG 7 seeks to ‘ensure access to energy for all’.** Municipal policy can help to achieve that goal by spurring on energy efficiency (by investing in green public buildings and including sustainability criteria in public tenders).
- **SDG 8, ‘promote sustainable economic growth and decent work’,** can be achieved locally through economic development strategies which make full use of the specific potential of each area. Furthermore, target 8.9 calls for the development of tourism that promotes local culture and products.
- Although **SDG 9, ‘build infrastructure, promote industrialisation and foster innovation’,** at first glance might seem to be a goal for national authorities, sub-national bodies do wield influence. The action in that area revolves around infrastructure, specifically roads, and creating a favourable environment for local start-ups and internet access in public spaces.
- **SDG 10, ‘reduce inequality within and among countries’,** is especially relevant for local authorities: they are in a prime position to recognise inequality and discrimination, and promote the inclusion of groups and individuals. They also play a vital role in the introduction of policies which support the most marginalised areas, and thus contribute to reducing domestic inequality.
- **SDG 12, ‘ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns’,** contains targets on recycling and on reducing food-waste and other waste, challenges which must be tackled at local level.
- **SDG 13, ‘take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts’,** calls for improved city and community resilience,³⁹ and the promotion of town planning which includes measures to adapt to and mitigate climate change.
- **SDG 14 seeks to conserve the oceans, seas and marine resources.** Local authorities, especially if in coastal areas or in a river basin, can make vast contributions. The majority of marine pollution comes from land.
- **SDG 15 seeks to ‘combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss’.** Local authorities can, for example, promote ecosystems particular to their regions within their local development strategies.
- **SDG 16 seeks to ‘promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies’.** This will happen through efficient, responsible, transparent institutions at all levels, including local levels. To do so, local authorities should commit to fighting corruption, improving public access to information on local government, and to fostering public participation, particularly in the decision-making process when it affects their communities.
- **SDG 17 seeks to ‘revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development’.** The local sphere is adapted to creating development partnerships comprising a broad range of participants: civil society, the private sector and public authorities. Decentralised cooperation is highly important for the development of partnerships between global, national and local levels, and shows huge potential for the promotion of local perspectives in international bodies and putting into practice tangible plans to achieve the SDGs.

³⁹ ‘Resilience’ is the ability of a community, a country or region to resist, react to and recover quickly from shock and tension such as violence, conflict, heatwaves, drought and other natural disasters, without hindering long-term development ([Building resilience: The EU’s Approach](#), ECHO, 2016).

4.2. The vehicles for localising the 2030 Agenda

Thanks to their public proximity, local authorities hold a comparative advantage over other bodies with regard to putting the 2030 Agenda into action. The SDG localisation road map, prepared by the Global Taskforce and UN-Habitat, centres on four areas particularly suitable for local authority involvement. Decentralised cooperation can serve as a catalyst in each of those areas by promoting reciprocal learning and providing additional resources:⁴⁰

- **inclusive information and education campaigns** about the SDGs, especially on how the public can contribute to their success in their daily lives. As the level of government closest to the public, local authorities are the most able to translate the SDGs into reality in the local context, and thus build ownership of the global agenda at local level.

The LADDER project (2015-2017)⁴¹ (*Local authorities as drivers for development education and raising awareness*) brings together municipalities, local authority associations and civil society groups from 18 Member States and 17 neighbouring countries. The goal is to build local authority and civil society capacity to become catalysts to raise awareness and rally the public behind development through experience exchanges and reciprocal learning, and behind citizens' projects and cultural initiatives for development education.

- **taking part in national dialogue** to include local perspectives in national strategies on how to put the SDGs into practice. In adopting a proactive approach in this area, local authority associations should promote the creation of legal and political frameworks which would give local authorities the means and funding to contribute effectively to achieving the 2030 Agenda. Decentralised cooperation can, for its part, not only give rise to best practice exchanges, but also furnish arguments in favour of greater decentralisation and housing power closer to citizens.

Promoting good governance and decentralisation: to ensure the provision of services and fair distribution of resources, the Aberdeen Agenda, adopted in 2005, lists an array of principles to promote local democracy and good governance. The standards suggested were drafted by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, a multilateral form of decentralised cooperation. They cover local elections, devolution of some competences, transparency and partnership with national governments.⁴² The Aberdeen Agenda was also adopted by the national governments of Commonwealth nations and can serve as a valuable political tool to boost democratic legitimacy and build the capacities of local governments in countries where decentralisation has faltered.

- **the actual implementation of the SDGs**, especially those relating to basic services managed by local authorities. The realisation of the goals set out in the

⁴⁰ Global Taskforce of Local and Regional governments, UN-Habitat, UNDP, [Roadmap for localizing the SDGs: implementation and monitoring at subnational level](#).

⁴¹ LADDER (Local Authorities for Development Education and Awareness Raising), [Local Authorities and Civil Society as multipliers to raise awareness and engage citizens](#), 2016.

⁴² [Aberdeen Agenda](#), Commonwealth Local Government Conference, 2005.

2030 Agenda will call for a number of actions at local level: the creation of broad partnerships, the harmonisation of development strategies, the creation and implementation of projects, and raising funds.

The integrated management of solid urban waste in South America: this decentralised cooperation project took place from 2004 to 2012 and involved the Region of Tuscany and a number of South American municipalities. It enabled local administrations' waste-management capacities to be built, thanks to best practice exchanges between the public service operators in the management and technical fields. The project also resulted in improvements to working conditions (through the creation of cooperatives and formalisation of jobs) along with the social integration of waste management workers.⁴³

- **local-level monitoring is essential** when it comes to highlighting domestic inequality and 'leaving no one behind'. That monitoring requires desegregated data which can be used in targeted action later.

Financing and putting the SDGs into practice in urban agglomerations. At the heart of the project is an IT platform 'Resilience.io' which enables economic, geographic and social data from a region to be harvested and modelled for use in integrated planning and investment. The 10-year project will be rolled out first in Ghana, China and the UK.

5. The European framework for decentralised cooperation

5.1. From the recognition of local authorities' developmental role to EU-backed decentralised cooperation

The establishment of a European framework to support decentralised cooperation is very much in keeping with the broader dynamic of recognising local authorities at international and European level.

The European Consensus on Development (2006) promotes wider participation of 'national assemblies, parliaments and local authorities', which, as their members are elected representatives, play an essential role as a check in the democratic system. The Agenda for Change⁴⁴ which is the strategic framework for 2014-2020 considers them key partners when it comes to achieving the goals on democracy, human rights, good governance and with regard to sustainable and inclusive growth.

Decentralised cooperation was mentioned in the Lomé Convention signed in 1989 (Article 12(a) specifies that convention funds may be used to support decentralised cooperation). During a revision of the Cotonou Agreement in 2005, a chapter on microprojects and decentralised cooperation was included. It provides for decentralised cooperation to be supported in the multiannual financial framework for ACP-EU cooperation, chiefly by European Development Funds (EDF).

⁴³ [Localization of the SDGs: Experiences and Lessons learned from Tuscany](#), Florence, April 2017, pp.18-19.

⁴⁴ European Commission Communication, [Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change](#), (COM(2011) 637 final).

But two communications from the European Commission – ‘Local Authorities: Actors for development’, from 2008,⁴⁵ and ‘Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes’ from 2013⁴⁶ – constitute a reference framework for EU action to promote decentralised cooperation.

The 2013 communication deals with relationships between local authorities and organisations more broadly, and is seen as holding serious potential for strengthening democracy, good governance and poverty reduction given the specific skills of local actors and their proximity to citizens. The new dimension of development cooperation does, however, bear the risk of further aid fragmentation and thus reducing its effectiveness. For that reason, the Commission recommends coordinating and encouraging decentralised development cooperation through a common framework.

Part of the new tool is a new thematic programme which supports non-state actors and local authorities (NSA-LA) in development within the framework of the financing mechanism of the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI). The programme is flanked by an information-sharing platform, the opening of structured dialogue and the drafting of a reference document on effective aid for local authorities. The 2013 communication is based on the outcome of the 2010-2011 structured dialogue,⁴⁷ and underscores EU support in the decentralisation process, including fiscal support, and in the process of building local authorities’ capacity. The establishment and strengthening of local authority associations in partner countries are seen as prerequisites to the associations’ involvement in the development process being as successful as possible. To further those goals, decentralised cooperation should be built upon equal partnerships, as a way to foster peer learning and skills transfer.

In its **conclusions of 22 July 2013** the Council recognises the key role that local authorities play in development and reiterates the EU’s support for the processes of decentralisation and good governance at local level. In this context, the Council recognises the added value that decentralised cooperation can bring, and encourages the Commission to explore new funding methods to support local authorities and their associations.

5.2. Setting up European support for decentralised cooperation

Despite growing political recognition, support for decentralised cooperation is still minor in terms of funding: it received an estimated 0.3 % of EU public development aid in the 2007-2011 period.⁴⁸

There is no specific programme designed to promote decentralised cooperation itself. However, the majority of thematic and geographic programmes tend to be used to co-finance partnerships between local authorities. Platforma (European Platform of Local and Regional Authorities for Development) wrote a guide for authorities which mentions no fewer than 17 instruments and programmes, some of which are geographic funds for regional cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries (Interreg).⁴⁹ The association states that, whilst many programmes are indeed open to local authority

⁴⁵ Commission Communication, [Local Authorities: Actors for Development](#), (COM(2008) 629 final).

⁴⁶ Commission Communication, [Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes](#), (COM(2013)0280 final).

⁴⁷ [Final Statement of the Structured Dialogue for an efficient partnership in development](#), May 2011.

⁴⁸ A. Fernández de Losada, M. Barceló, R. Rebowska, [Study on capitalisation of European decentralised cooperation experiences](#), B&S Europe, 2013, p.8.

⁴⁹ Platforma, [Handbook. For a successful project](#), June 2016.

applications, EU funds remain difficult for local authorities to access: setting aside some large municipalities and regions of southern Member States with a wealth of international experience, the majority of local authorities in the EU – and even more in developing countries – lack knowledge and experience in this area.

A study by Fernández de Losada, Barceló, and Rebowska⁵⁰ shows that, in practice, the EU supports decentralised cooperation through geographic programmes such as URB-AL (development of direct and lasting partnerships between local authorities in Europe and Latin America, DCI), CIUDAD (support for lasting partnerships between local authorities from the EU and neighbouring countries, ENI) and ARIAL⁵¹ (supporting and strengthening local government associations at ACP national and regional levels, EDF) and CBC (cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries, ENI).⁵² Half the decentralised cooperation projects involve ACP countries. Local authorities in southern Member States (France, Italy and Spain make up 79 %) and Nordic countries (21 %) are involved most often, although the Nordic authorities take part through their national associations rather than directly. More than half the projects centre on capacity-building and good governance.

The thematic programme NSA-LA has a wide scope targeting local authorities and civil society organisations. The programme has grown from €1.567 billion for 2007-2013 to €1.907 billion for the second round, 2014-2020, and is structured around three priorities⁵³:

- encouraging CSOs and local authorities to take part in poverty reduction and sustainable development in partner countries (83 % of the 2007-2013 programme's total budget; 65-75 % planned for 2014-2020),
- supporting education measures in the EU and partner countries to promote ownership by the public of the SDGs (14 % of the 2007-2013 budget, 10-15 % planned for 2014-2020),
- supporting local authority organisations and CSO networks at regional and global level (2 % of the 2007-2013 budget, 5-10 % planned for 2014-2020).

To boost partner countries' local authorities' contributions to the development process, the programme is intended to bolster good governance at local level and their capacities as basic service providers. Support for local authority associations – a multilateral variant of decentralised cooperation – is intended, in part, to enable them to take part in training and implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda. Approximately 15 % of the €1 567 billion NSA-LA fund was allocated to local authorities between 2007 and 2013.⁵⁴ Among the

Commission initiative: fostering cooperation between cities for effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda

The initiative will ease the way for peer cooperation between cities in the EU and 11 countries around the world. It is intended to boost, through technical cooperation (without direct funding), the methods and skills used to put into place local action plans for the new urban agenda, the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

⁵⁰ A. Fernández de Losada, M. Barceló, R. Rebowska, op.cit.

⁵¹ [The ARIAL programme – Background](#).

⁵² A. Fernández de Losada, M. Barceló, R. Rebowska, op.cit.

[Multiannual Indicative Programme "Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities" 2014-2020](#), pp.6-7; A. Marquez Camacho, [EU engagement with Local Authorities and Civil Society to support development in partner countries](#), European Commission - DG DEVCO.

⁵⁴ Calculations based on data available in [Evaluation of the Non State Actors and Local Authorities thematic programme \(2007-2013\)](#), December 2013, pp.16, 39, 53.

schemes funded by the local authority budget line for the same period, only 72 of 339, some 23 %, can be considered decentralised cooperation.⁵⁵ Three per cent of calls for tenders made in the 2007-2013 programme recommended the formation of a consortium including at least one European partner.⁵⁶ Clearly, the prime goal of NSA-LA is capacity-building in local authorities and civil society, not experience exchanges, knowledge transfer or the creation of partnerships between local authorities (except the multilateral institutionalised type, the promotion of associations and networks). The provisional multiannual programme for 2014-2020 states that decentralised cooperation should be promoted when appropriate with regard to meeting the goals of the programme, but without making it a preferred form of cooperation.

In the absence of a systematic quantitative study on the roll-out of decentralised cooperation, these are studies which enable us to understand its impact qualitatively and recognise its potential. The cases of decentralised cooperation financed by the EU as part of the NSA-LA programme enable us to draw some conclusions on the added value gained from this type of partnership. That added value is evident in:⁵⁷

- the strengthening of local authority capacity with regard to governance, support for decentralisation, and bolstering their activity internationally;
- supporting territorial integrity in development, including access to basic services;
- supporting resilience in times of crises: the partnerships set up at local level enable aid to be delivered when communication with the central government is not possible.

5.3. European Parliament and consultative committee positions

5.3.1. European Parliament

In its resolution of 15 March 2007 on local authorities and development cooperation (2006/2235(INI)),⁵⁸ the Parliament highlighted the unique expertise that European local authorities hold in urban and rural development and their capacity to mobilise the public locally. In developing countries, local authorities are a key element in the ownership of development policies and in the construction of multi-actor partnerships. MEPs called on the Commission to give greater prominence to local authorities in future financial instruments with a view to giving them direct access to Community funding.

More recently, in its 14 February 2017 resolution on the revision of the European Consensus on Development,⁵⁹ Parliament recognises the role of decentralised cooperation as an effective means for mutual capacity-strengthening and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at local level. MEPs consider local authority capacity a prerequisite to the building of a territorial approach to development and to better address inequalities within countries.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 28-29.

⁵⁶ [Evaluation of the Non State Actors and Local Authorities thematic programme \(2007-2013\)](#), December 2013, p.22.

⁵⁷ Ch. Mestre, G. Pinol, [Coopération décentralisée, Quelques leçons du terrain sur les pratiques des autorités locales en matières de développement](#), DAI, September 2015.

⁵⁸ [European Parliament resolution of 15 March 2007 on local authorities and development cooperation \(2006/2235\(INI\)\)](#).

⁵⁹ [European Parliament resolution of 14 February 2017 on the revision of the European Consensus on Development \(2016/2094\(INI\)\)](#).

5.3.2. *The Committee of the Regions*

The Committee of the Regions highlighted in its opinion on the new European Consensus on Development⁶⁰ of February 2017 the need to involve all levels of public bodies in the SDGs, including local and regional authorities, and to support the local authorities when it comes to improving access to and the quality of basic services.

Attention should be paid to the role that decentralised cooperation can play, principally regarding experience and capacity exchanges, the creation of spaces to involve the global public and as a tool for triangular cooperation.

The Committee of the Regions urges the New Consensus on Development to recognise and foster the potential of that type of cooperation. It also affirms its willingness to coordinate exchanges between local and regional authorities in the EU and neighbouring countries, specifically through the international bodies of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) and the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP).

This position supports and furthers that expressed in 2005.⁶¹ In the 'Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on Decentralised cooperation in the reform of the EU's development policy', the Committee expressed its regret about the insufficient recognition of what decentralised cooperation can bring to European development policy, resulting in the inconsistent weight given to it in external action programmes and financial instruments.

Assises of Decentralised Cooperation

This event, which is co-organised by the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions, has taken place every other year since 2011. It brings together representatives of local authorities from the EU and developing countries along with international institutions for experience exchanges and to explore the opportunities that decentralised cooperation brings.

The fifth edition takes place on 10 and 11 July 2017 in Brussels.

6. The way forward: prospects and hurdles for decentralised cooperation

Decentralised cooperation (a partnership – often long-term – between peers) undoubtedly fits into the new development paradigm, reiterated in the 2030 Agenda, which goes further than the traditional concept of development aid. The old paradigm was a relationship sometimes considered somewhat paternalistic between rich donor countries and poor recipient countries.

At the heart of the new approach is the concept of mutually beneficial, horizontal partnerships which promote independent development capacity.⁶² The growing involvement, particularly in France, of local companies in decentralised cooperation relationships brings the possibility of profitability to sustainable development projects. The potential to generate profit tallies perfectly with the current trend of widening

⁶⁰ European Committee of the Regions [Opinion: Proposal for a new European Consensus on Development - Our World, our Dignity, our Future](#), 8 February 2017, CDR 6940/2016.

⁶¹ Opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 16 November 2005 on '[Decentralised cooperation in the reform of the EU's development policy](#)', CdR 224/20059.

⁶² F. Nganje, [Decentralized Cooperation and the New Development Cooperation Agenda: What Role for the UN?](#), United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, November 2015, pp.3-4.

financial pools for development cooperation by channelling private investment into development goals through various forms of Public-Private-Partnership (PPP).⁶³

Fernández de Losada (2017) stresses that the power of decentralised cooperation lies in its territorial and horizontal dimension, which capitalises on the ability of local authorities to encourage a range of actors – the public, NGOs, universities, and the private sector – to support a partnership process between regions. Thus, by promoting north-south exchanges between territorial entities, a wide range of stakeholders are involved in planning, putting into place and following up on public policy, and decentralised cooperation can lend impetus to the array of processes covered by the SDG term 'localisation'.

In the same vein, Ribera argues that the SDGs should be achieved by choosing a local 2030 urban agenda. This would cover the many gaps in the 2030 Agenda's urban goal, the New Urban Agenda, which is considered flimsy with regard to its implementation methods.⁶⁴ The global action plan for cities and local authorities would revolve around decentralised cooperation, the catalyst for change. According to the author, municipalities are particularly apt to serve as a testing ground for integrated actions, with a view to simultaneously achieving many SDGs and to bring coherence to policy at local level. The best results could then be replicated and shared in a structured reciprocal learning process which could be used systematically through methodological tool kits and coordination mechanisms.

Decentralised cooperation in its multilateral institutionalised form can also raise the status of local authorities by adding to their weight domestically through international recognition. Some degree of decentralisation and suitable competences, along with access to public resources, both financial and institutional, are prerequisites for territorial partnerships for the local implementation of the SDGs. By the same token, networks of sub-national authorities can coordinate and give a framework to decentralised cooperation to mitigate the egregious consequences that fragmented aid can lead to. Whilst numerous initiatives are being taken in an effort to reduce aid fragmentation caused by a surge in cooperative relationships and transaction costs, which creates congestion in the partner countries, the development of decentralised cooperation seems to be moving against the tide.⁶⁵ That hurdle can be overcome through delegated cooperation, in this case local authorities or organisations entrusting the running of their cooperation programme to an authority or organisation present on the ground, to coordination platforms at regional level, to local authority associations or to UNDP ART. The inevitable costs incurred by the coordination, although all too real, would be outweighed by the benefits to the territorial partners, bringing real potential in terms of capacity-building and the localisation of global agenda.

Moreover, there is another hurdle to clear which constrains the benefits (see Table 3) of decentralised cooperation: the deep socioeconomic and political differences between south and north put a damper on the relevance of mutual learning. One route to overcoming that problem is to work triangularly: an exchange of good practices tailored

⁶³ B. Boidin, A. Djeflat, [Mutations et questions autour de la coopération décentralisée](#), Mondes en développement 2016/3 (No 175), pp. 7-22 (in French). DOI 10.3917/med.175.0007.

⁶⁴ T. Ribera, [Want sustainable urban development? It's time for Local Agenda 2030](#), 5 January 2017.

⁶⁵ E. Waeterloos and R. Renard, [Towards 'Unity in diversity' in European development aid through donor harmonization and decentralized cooperation? A case study of Flanders and Belgium](#). Public Admin. Dev., (2013) 33: 325–342.

to the south can be rounded off by institutional capacity-building led by the northern partner(s).

Another path to explore would be to involve the diaspora living in the northern city in the decentralised cooperation as a link to the reality in the south, a move which would also aid integration in the north.⁶⁶

Table 3 – Advantages and risks of decentralised cooperation

Decentralised cooperation	
The advantages	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer cooperation relationships moulded to fit the new development paradigm (universal goals and inclusive partnerships as drivers) • Potential to funnel private sector funds into solidarity investments in the south • Technical skills exchange with potentially mutual benefits • Wider local ownership of the global agenda in the north and south 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aid fragmentation resulting in a spike in projects and interest groups • High coordination and institutionalisation costs • Differing contexts in the north and south limit the relevance of common projects • Monitoring of involved companies' social responsibilities in mercantile development projects

The EU has a role to play to structure and support the decentralised cooperation of European territorial entities, which take part in cooperation to highly variable extents. The recognition lent by the new Consensus to the strategic development role that the local level and decentralised cooperation will play in the implementation of the SDGs could be a springboard for bolstered EU support. Aside from increased financial commitments, the changes will require more focus on decentralised cooperation through a specific programme or, at least, a separate budget line. That change in focus would promote the emergence of new partnerships and channel existing partnerships toward better efficacy and relevance with regard to the 2030 Agenda. This would also make the European public aware of the need to put that universal agenda into action at local, national and global levels.

⁶⁶ M.-P. Battas, [Un local global ? Une coopération décentralisée au DSU](#), *Le sociographe* 2012/4, n.40 (in French).

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Cooperation between sub-national authorities is a potentially powerful tool for the local implementation and public ownership of the 2030 Agenda. Without application at every level that ambitious, comprehensive agenda might never come to fruition.

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