Localising the sustainable development goals (SDGs)

The role of Local Government in context

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ABSTRACT

The United Nations (UN) has of late been debating the new international development framework that will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) post–2015. This process has been popularly referred to as the post-2015 development agenda. It is a fact that many of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) that have been identified will impact on the role and responsibilities of local government, namely, poverty reduction; access to water and sanitation; health; education; economic growth; development of cities and human settlements; and resilience to climate change. A critical issue that was highlighted when the MDGs were introduced in 2000 was the implementation modalities as it was felt that the process and goals were primarily top down *(CLGF 2014:3). Consequently, there has been strong advocacy for local government to be a key implementation partner in the achievement of the new sustainable development goals that would have been finalised in September 2015 (www.worldwewant2015.org/ localising2015; CLGF 2014:3; www.capacity.undp.org; Slack 2014:1).*

Key aspects of the debate and discussion to date have been how to localise the new development framework, evaluate the local impact of the future SDGs and ensure that the local dimension is prioritised and successfully implemented (UNDP 2014a:3). There is a firm belief that the issue of localisation has to extend beyond national, provincial/state/regional implementation and there should be a focus on how the new development agenda will be implemented locally and the implications for the local level of government in this regard. According to the UN, localisation *denotes the "process of defining; implementing; and monitoring strategies at the local level for achievable global, national and subnational sustainable goals and targets" (UNDP 2014a:3). This process would involve the utilisation of distinct tools, mechanisms, strategies, platforms and innovations to ensure that the development agenda is effectively translated into firm action and concrete results at the local level to benefit communities. It is envisaged that it will be an inclusive process and will move beyond the municipal jurisdiction to draw in relevant stakeholders to create a strong and capable local authority. Viewed in*

this context, localisation is an integral part of the multilevel governmental system and more so in terms of attaining the sustainable development goals that will be shortly adopted by the international community (CLGF 2014:3).

INTRODUCTION

In the past two years, there has been a global dialogue as to what should replace the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) when they officially cease to exist at the end of 2015. In the countdown to the end of 2015, international attention has focused on assessing the progress made thus far, and, more importantly, the mammoth challenges still faced, particularly by the developing countries in addressing the issue of poverty and also reducing inequality. According to Slack (2014:1), although considerable progress has been made, in that poverty has been halved, over two million people now have access to drinking water, and tremendous advances have been made in the fight against communicable diseases (tuberculosis and malaria), progress has generally been uneven. She adds that more than 1,2 billion people are still living in poverty and more than 2,5 billion people do not have basic sanitation facilities, and progress has been slow in reducing maternal mortality rates (2014:1). There has been a rapid increase in the global population and it is expected that around 60% of people will live in cities by the year 2030 (UNDP 2014d:3).

Given the above, the global development challenges in the past decade have reached new heights in terms of new issues being prioritised and subsequently the increasing demand for and access to public goods and services internationally, which have necessitated innovative institutional arrangements and solutions. It has also become abundantly clear that there is interconnectivity between the international, regional, national and local dimensions of development (UNDP 2014b:1). There has been considerable lobbying locally, nationally and internationally, and a strong case has been made out for local government to be an implementation partner in terms of the setting, delivery and monitoring of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (CLGF 2014:3; **www.worldwewant2015.org/localising 2015**;UNDP 2014e:3 and UNDP 2014d:12). It has been pointed out that not only are many of the key basic services essential to meeting the SDGs delivered at the local level, but that municipalities are in the best position to ensure that the needs of the local population are understood and met, and that it "it leaves no one behind" (Slack 2014:1). This article critically reviews local government's role in the new development agenda beyond 2015 and the resultant localisation process; the experiences of implementing the MDGs in the local sphere; lessons (both positive and negative) for the SDGs; challenges faced by local governments in implementing the SDGs; and envisaged solutions in this regard.

THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA AND PROCESS IN CONTEXT

The deadline to reach consensus on a new international development framework to replace

the MDGs has been fast approaching and it was envisaged that it should be finalised in September 2015. The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals[1] presented its report to the General Assembly of the United Nations, and it will constitute the "main basis for integrating sustainable development goals into the post-2015 agenda" (UNDP 2014c:6). Unlike with the MDGs when they were initially introduced in 2000, there was only national government involvement, the process has been much more inclusive this time, as it involves local government, civil society, the private sector, as well as national, regional and international stakeholders (UNDP 2014f:5). A High-Level Panel was set up to provide the required guidance and direction to the Secretary General of the United Nations in this regard. Local government, and proponents of decentralisation and local development, took advantage of the space provided for engagement on the proposed 2015 development agenda and framework and promoted the notion of *localisation*. It was quite apparent that there was a strong commitment to the localisation of the SDGs (Slack 2014:1).

The next major activity in the post-2015 development process was a Synthesis Report generated by the Secretary General of the United Nations in December 2014. Negotiations between governments commenced earnestly in January 2015 and will continue for the next couple of months culminating in the approval of the new post-2015 international development framework at a UN Summit in September 2015 (UNDP 2014c:6).

Sustainable development can be viewed as an integrated agenda and fundamental principle, which endeavours to provide solutions to economic, social and environmental challenges. The inter-linkage and interweaving of all its dimensions is one of its intrinsic characteristics (UNDP 2012:23). It would seem that the greatest challenge would in fact have to respond to all the goals cohesively and in an integrated manner. In this context, the mandate of the General Assembly of the United Nations at the Sustainable Development Conference was that the

> *goals should be action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries, while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national powers and priorities (UNDP 2014f:15).*

Tentatively, 17 sustainable development goals have been agreed on and they are: end poverty/ hunger and achieve food security; improve nutrition and sustainable agriculture; ensure healthy lives; ensure equitable quality education/promote lifelong learning opportunities; achieve gender equality; availability of water/sustainable sanitation; access to affordable and reliable energy; sustainable inclusive economic growth and full employment; build resilient infrastructure/sustainable industrialisation; inclusive safe cities/ and human settlements; ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; combat climate change; sustainable oceans, seas and marine resources; protect, restore and promote terrestrial ecosystems, manage forests/ halt biodiversity loss/ combat desertification; promote peaceful, inclusive societies, provide access to justice and build effective and capable institutions and strengthen implementation and global partnership for sustainable development (**www. sustainable development.un.org/content/documents/4044140602working document.pdf; UNDP 2014f:14; undocs.org/A/68/970**).

Ensuring that the SDGs are more relevant to municipal jurisdictions was highlighted in SDG 11, which was clearly a dedicated *urban* goal and was detailed in the Open Working Group Proposal outcome document. It is *local* by virtue of its design and ownership as it is supposed to be delivered by subnational urban governments. The critical role that regional and local governments jointly play together with the local communities and the private and non-governmental sector in discharging their obligations relative to the new international development framework has been acknowledged as there has been a great deal of advocacy in this regard. According to the UNDP (2014c:7), a free-standing urban goal would address the concern raised by the High-Level Panel that the cities would in fact be the physical localities where sustainable development could either be a success or not. Furthermore, a dedicated urban goal would mobilise subnational governments and key role players and stakeholders in integrating the different components of sustainable development (spatial, social, environmental and economic), strengthen the linkages between the urban and rural areas, and at the same time address the resultant urban opportunities and challenges. It is envisaged that Goal 11 would be all encompassing and broadly include slum upgrading; housing and urban services; participatory planning; the safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage; disaster management; environmental issues; green and public spaces, and urban and rural links (UNDP 2014c:7).

It would appear that Goal 11 does not cover and take cognisance of urban development holistically. Several critical issues impacting on local government, notably local democracy, decentralisation, subsidiarity, participation and public accountability, have not been mentioned and highlighted in this regard, and furthermore other critical issues and responsibilities have been included elsewhere[2]. There is also a firm view that the number of SDGs is large and there has to be a reduction or consolidation in this regard.

LOCALISATION OF THE 2015 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

The move to localisation

There is growing awareness, recognition and acknowledgement by the international development community and national governments that the local sphere of government is in the best position to facilitate the mobilisation of local development stakeholders, notably the NGO and private sectors, local communities, and national and international organisations, for promoting inclusive sustainable development within their respective localities. Consequently, they are ideally placed to generate and implement integrated cross-cutting and sectoral strategies, which straddle the public sector for the post-2015, post-development agenda (UNDP 2014c:6 and UNDP 2014d:12). The national and local government context is of considerable importance for the functioning of public institutions as they are to a large extent shaped by political realities, and by historical and socio-economic contexts and behaviours, and consequently solutions must be adapted to the local context if any progress is to be seen (UNDP 2014e:14). In developing this line of thinking further, Slack (2014:176) adds that there is a real possibility that the localisation of the SDGs will be part of a strategy for implementing the new international development framework being proposed.

If that does happen, it will indeed be a significant shift in terms of recognition of the benefits of a localised approach to development and, more importantly, of promoting sustainable development from the bottom up as well as from the top downwards. In this regard, the comments made by Ban Ki Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, on 28 May 2013 at the meeting of the *Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Government* for the new development agenda beyond 2015 has relevance:

> It is often said that like all politics, all development is ultimately local. As the world strives for a more sustainable path in the years ahead, particularly beyond 2015, local voices and local action will be crucial elements in our midst …. It is crucial to preserve and nurture political spaces where local authorities can have an impact on decision-making at the global level …. Local authorities have significantly increased their engagement in global processes. The inputs of local leaders and municipal planners have never been more critical to guiding member states towards embracing policies that achieve green, sustainable and inclusive cities (UNDP 2014b:1).

A critical challenge encountered in the early implementation of the MDGs as opposed to the SDGs was the initial lack of grassroots consultation and support and, most importantly, community ownership (UNDP 2012:7). A document titled *Toolkit for Localising the Millenial Development Goals: A UNDP Capacity Development Resource*, published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2005, introduced the notion of *localisation* of the MDGs and, most importantly, popularised the concept. The evaluation of MDGs midterm in September 2008 generated a report titled *Committed to Action – Achieving the MDGs: Background Note by the UN Secretary General to the High-Level Event on the MDGs*. It highlights certain key focus areas, which in fact resulted in considerable debate and discussion. It became quite clear at that stage that the achievement of the MDGs was not just the compilation of statistics in particular sectors, but it went beyond that in that it also required information on aspects relating to sustainability of the gains made, local ownership, local institutions viability and public accountability (UNDP 2014b:2). In fact, the phrase *localisation of the MDGs* was coined in the publication titled, *Urban Millennium Partnership: Localising MDGs for Meeting the Challenges of MDGs in Cities*, which was published by the UNDP in 2011.

A key lesson that emerged then provided the impetus for change. It was quite apparent that the achievement of key objectives of the post-2015 development agenda, notably, poverty eradication, reduction of inequalities, exclusion, and achieving environmental sustainability, would depend on firm and decisive local action and local buy-in and ownership, and that it has to be located in a well co-ordinated multilevel public governance system (UNDP 2014b:2). It was also quite evident that any development agenda post-2015 would only be deemed successful if the implementation has had the desired impact on local communities. Furthermore, many of the decisions that impact on the local level are taken at the national and regional levels in a multilevel governmental framework where there is a great deal of collaboration (UNDP 2014b:2). The role of cities in development is likely to increase as it is anticipated that the majority of the world's population will be living in cities by 2030.

According to the UNDP (2014e:3), the concept *localisation* refers to the process of defining, implementing and monitoring strategies at the local level for achieving global, national and subnational sustainable development goals and targets. This involves various

concrete mechanisms, tools, innovations, platforms and processes to effectively translate the development agenda into results at the local level. Viewed much more holistically, the understanding of the term should extend beyond the structures of local government in a particular municipal jurisdiction, to incorporate all the key role players and stakeholders, notably, organs of civil society, traditional leaders, religious organisations, academia, the private sector and others (UNDP 2014e:3). In this regard, there has to be capable and strong local government that is well capacitated to take the lead in terms of convening all the key role players and stakeholders to initiate local development initiatives.

Localisation of the new global development framework by implication means that the implementation of the SDGs goals at the local level would be by subnational actors, more specifically local and regional governments[3]. In fact, internationally. Subnational governments have responsibilities for many of the SDGs or, in some cases, share them with central or provincial government or in partnership with other role players or stakeholders. Localising the post-development agenda can also imply the monitoring of programmes at subnational level irrespective of whether local governments have the defined competencies in that particular area or not. This would assist in the longer term assessment of inequalities within countries that would enhance decision-making qualitatively and ensure improved resource allocation to all. More importantly, it will enable local communities and community-based organisations to hold governments publicly accountable for the progress made relative to the achievement of the SDGs (UNDP 2014c:8).

The description *localisation* also has implications for the selection of targets. Monitoring of inequalities within countries will mean that most outcome-based targets merit disaggregation at the subnational level; however, at the same time an emphasis on the implementation of goals could result in local governments adopting subsets of the goals and targets for which they have direct responsibility (UNDP 2014d:8). At the same time, localisation will reflect much more accurately the state of local communities and provide a much more detailed overall picture of the progress being made in particular localities. According to Milagro Navas, Mayor of Antiguo Cuscatlan Municipality in El Salvador, "local strategic planning would allow a greater integration of the three pillars of development: social, economic and environmental. Likewise, further integration between urban and rural areas needs to be promoted, in order to foster greater territorial cohesion" (UNDP 2014d:12). In this context, two documents produced under the auspices of the UNDP (2014d:12; 2014e:14-16) point out that:

- Local and regional governments are key to ensuring sustainable and inclusive development within their jurisdictions for the implementation of the development agenda beyond 2015. The functioning of public institutions has to take cognisance of the country and local context as they are largely informed by the historical, social and economic situation. Consequently, solutions to local problems have to incorporate the local context.
- An integrated multilevel and multi-stakeholder strategy that is bottom up is imperative to promote transformative agendas and ensure ownership of the post-2015 development framework in municipalities. National governments should undertake concerted and co-ordinated action to strengthen local stakeholders and prioritise local development.
- The inclusion of a diversity of local stakeholders can be secured through effective local Governance, thereby ensuring ownership that is broad based and furthermore,

commitment and accountability. Local governments play a pivotal role in developing linkages between key role players and local stakeholders involved in local development and in this context draw their unique legitimacy from local democratic accountability and working closely with citizens and local communities.

In localisation, the key issue is attempting to develop a geographic approach that is local in terms of the post-2015 development framework, and this can be done by disaggregating data by place and furthermore ensuring that local authorities have an enhanced role in setting priorities, executing plans, monitoring results and engagement with local communities and the private sector. The participation of the community at large, in the final analysis, will determine the success of the localisation of the 2015 post-development programme. It is imperative to adopt a bottom-up approach and the focus should be on communicating and disseminating information on the SDGs and at the same time ensuring that there is complete understanding and greater local ownership of the process by raising awareness of the global nature of the agenda (UNDP 2014d:12).

Local stakeholders are critical to the process of the promotion of key values of culture (notably, heritage, creativity and diversity) and the transmission of knowledge as drivers and enablers of sustainable and inclusive development. In this context, distinct local cultures, including indigenous communities and traditional authorities, minorities and migrants, can be used as resource persons in terms of developing local policies, which will ultimately ensure that the entire process is viewed as being participative, legitimate and credible by the local communities. More importantly, localisation will ensure that a key component, that is diversity, is being embraced (UNDP 2014e:16).

The critical issues of the political and social leadership of women and the notion of equal participation also have to be factored into any discussion on the implementation of the SDGs at the local level. A stronger presence of women in local government will ensure more effective and full participation politically, socially and economically, which will have a major and very positive impact on local policy-making and decision-making (UNDP 2014d:13; UNDP 2014e:16).

In addition, the participation of the youth should also be encouraged and prioritised as an integral part of the future development agenda as it incorporates the political, socio-economic, religious, ethnic, cultural and gender dimensions of local development. More importantly, the participation of the youth is also reflective of local diversity, which is an important characteristic of localisation (UNDP 2014d:12). In this context, there has to be ongoing and regular consultations, dialogues and engagements between local governments and the relevant local role players and stakeholders in the broader context of public accountability, openness and transparency. The notion of *localisation* tends to extend beyond national or regional implementation and it is imperative to have a clear understanding of how the future global development agenda will be implemented locally, as well as the resultant implications for the local sphere of government in this regard (UNDP 2014e:3).

It is envisaged that the tentative SDGs that have been internationally agreed upon and that are well documented will be reduced in the final development framework to a manageable number so that it is possible for governments to work on them. By comparison, the MDGs comprised eight goals, 21 targets and 60 indicators (UN 2014c:8).

Key Challenges

There are several challenges that are likely to have an impact on the localisation of the SDGs globally, more so in developing countries. These issues need to be addressed in advance in preparation for the implementation and localisation of the SDGs. Some of the main challenges are highlighted below with possible solutions in terms of responding to them (CLGF 2014:1; Slack 2014:176; UNDP 2014a:16-20; UNDP 2014d: 12-13; **www.capacity.undp.org.**):

- **Capacity development and institutional building**. This has to be extended to municipal or local leadership, technical management capacity and human resources involved in localisation. Capacity gaps have to be identified among the key local role players and stakeholders. There is also a need for improved monitoring and evaluation and public accountability intergovernmental as well as multi-level co-ordination. "A new vision of capacity building at all levels is vital to transform governance and ensure that it serves the needs of sustainable development ... particularly … in developing countries; countries in democratic transition, ...experiencing and emerging from conflict and with limited income (Zarrouk 2014:2).

- **Decentralisation and constitutional protection.** There has to be adequate political and management will at central government level to facilitate decentralisation and provide constitutional protection in this regard. Local government ministers have to articulate the benefits of decentralisation and localisation and ensure that they are followed through in terms of implementation.

- **Adequate funding.** There has to be secure and dedicated funding either through redirecting public resources, overseas development assistance or a global fund. The localisation of SDGs has to be accompanied by resources localisation and provision has to be made for it in national and, where possible, international budgets.

- **Weak local governance and accountability.** Local accountability should be strengthened and partnerships developed with civil society, local NGOs and community based organisations. The increasing important role of local government in local economic development has necessitated partnerships with the private sector. The global development agenda has to be translated into practice in terms of development plans, nationally, provincially and locally, and linkages and partnerships with other development role players and stakeholders should enhance local development, ensure co-ordination and avoid duplication.

- **High levels of corruption.** The modus operandi for engagement have to be clearly defined to ensure transparency, accountability and collaboration between the local governing structures, so that the local stakeholders, the private sector and community-based organisations are promoted. Strict measures have to be in place to avoid and prevent corruption and fraud. Anticorruption measures have to be enforced in the public sector to ensure that funding is not diverted from the critical issue of SDGs localisation.

- **Access to local data.** Ensure that the local level can be included and disaggregated through national and international systems. More local data need to be accessed and collected to measure progress, and communities need to be sensitised to the SDGs and the local impact in terms of service delivery. Data at the local level are not

often readily available to support planning and the monitoring of local development. Reforms to official data collection services are imperative to assist subnational governments monitor progress. Local target setting necessitates the development of appropriate indicators that take cognisance of the local context.

The issues highlighted above are generally symptomatic of local governance challenges in developing countries. The discussions and debates currently taking place at the international level will ensure that these issues are being prioritised at the country level in preparation for the new international development framework and agenda. In addition, a significant number of countries are also currently busy improving their local governance to enhance much needed service delivery. Consequently, the response to these challenges would be a two-pronged approach, i.e. enhancing local government systems and management and the localisation of the MDGs.

MDGs LESSONS FOR THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

The vision embodied by the MDGs introduced in 2000, i.e. to ensure global unification of the socio-economic and environmental objectives, along with ensuring security and peace in the context of democratic values and the protection of the vulnerable and destitute, still has considerable relevance. The 15 years of experience gained implementing the MDGs proves that the international community can be galvanised into action by responding to complex international challenges (UNDP 2012:8; UNDP 2014f:5). In this context, governments, several key role players and community-based organisations worked collaboratively as part of an international collective in addressing several key challenges, such as the reduction of poverty and certain life-threatening diseases. Approaches that were considered innovative, additional and new resources, new tools and technology, and critical new data were generated in the process. The resultant effect was that a results-based approach to public policy, encouraging greater transparency and strengthening multilateral approaches, was promoted (UNDP 2014f:5). Some of the critical issues highlighted in the report to the Secretary General of the United Nations in this regard merit mentioning in detail (UNDP 2012:8; UNDP 2014f) :

- The format of the MDG framework (comprising goals, targets and indicators) is a major strength that has to be retained. A clear framework was in place based on goals that were not difficult to incorporate; accountability; quantifiable targets that had a definite timeframe; and measurable indicators. The targets were credible, realistic and achievable. Being more ambitious with targets and at the same time blending them with realism is important in the future.
- The focus on the end results in the MDGs was imperative in prioritising human development as part of national development. The focus on the end results should be retained and the means should be considered without appearing to be prescriptive. There should be guidelines for policy coherence, and success factors for effective implementation should be highlighted. There is a need for greater linkage between macro-economic policies and broader development objectives, notably, poverty

reduction; decent work and full employment; and sustainable food, nutrition and energy security.

- Determining collective goals and targets that can be pursued globally due to the high level of international interdependence is useful. However, there should not be a *one size fits all approach* and some flexibility should be built-in to adapt to conditions and priorities nationally, subnationally and regionally while taking cognisance of international standards.
- The focus on human development and poverty eradication should be maintained given the outstanding deficits from the MDGs, however, more pressing and outstanding issues not reflected in the MDGs should be prioritised, notably, inequalities within and between countries; climate change; epidemiological/demographic dynamics; urban growth; ensuring peace and security; governance and capacity; respecting cultural diversity and human rights.
- The international consensus on the MDG framework was a unifying factor. Greater interdependence internationally currently and in the future and global challenges will necessitate a representative global agenda for development shared internationally where goals and targets are defined more accurately to enhance and strengthen implementation and accountability.

Discussion on the *localisation* of the MDGs began earnestly in 2005, five years after it was initially conceptualised and implemented. However, a positive development in the case of the development framework post-2015 is that the discussion on the issue of *localisation* is taking place simultaneously as the SDGs are being negotiated and decided upon. This certainly augers well for the future in terms of implementation and complementing local government goals and targets. Akyüz (2010:14) has sounded a word of caution in that the post-2015 development framework should not merely be an extension of the MDGs, or even reformulating the goals with an increase or decrease in the key focus areas. He adds (2010:14) that it needs to move beyond that in terms of global systematic reforms to remove the major obstacles to development and at the same time secure an accommodating international environment for sustainable development.

THE SDGS AND LOCALISATION IN PRACTICE – ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND FUNDING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

There has been considerable lobbying internationally and a strong case has been made for local government to be an active partner in implementing the development agenda post-2015 (UNDP 2014a:3; UNDP 2014c:6; UNDP 2014d:12; UNDP 2014g:1). This aspect is particularly important as it entails translating the agenda into practice at the local level so that it impacts on and benefits local communities.

According to Slack (2014:175, 176) the critical focus areas that need attention, include *inter* alia, the identifying of local stakeholders for implementing the framework; analysing and defining the role and function of local government and other stakeholders in implementing targets; defining mechanisms and processes to facilitate implementation processes and identifying capacity gaps of local stakeholders; analysing participation

and inclusiveness for implementation processes (including local authority mechanisms); identifying simple monitoring and reporting systems including data sources and gaps; principles of development co-operation effectiveness locally; linking the process-related discussions to the thematic areas agreed by the Open Working Group; territorial solidarity and the impact of rural-urban solidarity in sustainability; and the consequences of increasing urbanisation on sustainability.

Decentralisation and Subsidiarity

Activities in the public sector should be discharged at the lowest possible level of government, and consequently the principle of subsidiarity has become an integral part of public governance internationally (UNDP 2014a:17; UNDP 2014d:13; CLGF 2014:13). Subsidiarity and effective decentralisation have thus constituted the basis of development of the post-2015 development framework and have been high on the agenda in terms of discussions. Decentralisation provides the institutional context in which public administration interventions have to be followed through in the public sector. The decentralised development co-operation model that has been operational in many countries internationally should be used as a strategy to support the local implementation of SDGs (UNDP 2014e:19).

A major constraint that has been encountered in many decentralisation initiatives internationally is the lack of administrative and management capacity at the local level and the resultant lack of accountability lines to the local communities (**www.undp.org/policy/practicenotes**). An enabling environment should constitute the basis for the devolution of power and enable local government to discharge its obligations, efficiently and effectively (UNDP 2014e:9). If decentralised government is expected to be successful, there needs to be a centre to facilitate the process. In this regard, consideration has to be given to fiscal transfer instruments; ensuring that local planning and budgeting feeds into the national budgeting and planning process; monitoring and oversight of the budget; and the required human resources (**www. undp.org/policy/practicenotes**).

Developmental local government has been an integral part of the post-2015 development framework process in terms of the framing and implementation of the SDGs. There has to be clear acknowledgement and definition of the role of local government, which needs to be emphasised with a focus on the following (CLGF 2014:10; UNDP 2014e:13-16; **www. capacity.undp.org.**):

- The key role played in setting, implementing and monitoring SDGs. The required enabling legal and policy framework has to be in place. National commitment has to be strong in terms of ensuring legal frameworks for local government that are adequate, and at the same time ensure the required financial and institutional capacity to promote local partnerships.
- Strong intergovernmental relations between the central, provincial/state and local government, and clarity of rules for and functions of even the national ministries, such as water, health, and education, is imperative for the successful localisation of the SDGs.
- Development at the local level can be supported by strong public-private partnerships. Critical to the process is enabling legislation and local accountability mechanisms for

effective implementation. It is imperative to launch national initiatives for development through, *inter alia*, corporate social responsibility in terms of a defined framework and policies that complement local realities.

- In collaboration with the national government and other key local stakeholders, local government can appropriately manage responses to the urbanisation challenges and work jointly with other levels of government and stakeholders to enhance the resilience at the local level.
- Local government associations are critical in providing a platform for local and intergovernmental relations, as well as critical capacity-building activities of good practice and training. This role should be supported and strengthened to facilitate localisation of the SDGs.
- There should be a concerted effort to enhance the quality of local human resources, political leadership, management and technical capacities of local government to mobilise local resources, deliver services and engage citizens in planning and decision-making, with a focus on the most excluded.
- Strategic planning at the local level promotes key critical areas, social, economic and environmental, which are in fact the three dimensions of development. Integrated and inclusive local development planning involves all the key role players and stakeholders and is an important instrument in promoting ownership and facilitating sustainable development and ultimately enhancing service delivery at the local level.

It has been pointed out that public investments and national planning should play a pivotal role in contributing to the localising of the development agenda post-2015. In this context, local governments are expected to develop positive linkages and, more importantly, ensure the required alignment with national policies and develop strategies to ensure a greater response to local needs and demands (UNDP 2014e:13). There has to be a well-structured and co-ordinated public governance system to ensure that the SDGs are attainable and achievable particularly in developing countries.

Local Government Funding for SDGs

There has to be adequate and equitable financial resources for the roles and responsibilities devolved to local government to facilitate the universal attainment of the SDGs within the prescribed period. Some of the key considerations highlighted (CLGF 2014:1; UNDP 2014d:12; UNDP 2014e:13; www.capacity.undp.org.) in this regard are:

- The role of local government involvement in achieving the SDGs should be fully costed and worked out in collaboration with the national and provincial spheres of government.
- Local government should be able to raise revenue towards the SDGs through enhanced tax collection and from new sources, or consideration should be given even to raising bonds. Creative, equitable and sustainable financing mechanisms need to be considered and applied at the local level.
- Allocations of national budgets to local governments has to be increased to support localisation of the SDGs, more specifically in areas that are construed as marginalised or post-conflict areas.

- Localisation of international development assistance and taxes should follow through with the localisation process and complement adequate central-to-local government transfers.
- The critical role played by local government in facilitating the process of LED should also be a pivotal factor in developing a sustainable tax base.

Funding is a critical issue in the localisation and attainment of the SDGs and consequently has to be accorded a high priority internationally as well as in a country context. Critical to the process are dedicated budgets, facilitating LED and generating new sources of revenue, with the national and provincial/state governments being active and strategic partners in the process in terms of playing an oversight role.

CONCLUSION

The MDGs as an international development framework ceased to exist at the end of 2015. There have been considerable international activities, in terms of debates, discussion and consultations initiated by the United Nations on an appropriate, responsive and relevant development framework to replace the MDGs, which have been in existence since 2000. The MDGs, as indicated in this article, had several major benefits, one of which was that it provided the international community with a framework and, furthermore, goals to aspire to in terms of global development. There has been considerable progress in reaching some of the targets, particularly in the case of provision of basic services in developing countries. However, the downside was that the initial MDGs introduced in 2000 were top-down and there was not much consultation with the developing countries; hence, there has not been the required buy-in and, more importantly, local ownership in this regard. However, with the new tentative post-2015 development framework and agenda, there have been the required consultations and dialogue and there has been consensus and agreement on the way forward. The expectation is that all of this will be formalised at the UN Summit scheduled to take place in September this year.

According to Zarrouk (2014:3) and the UNDP (2014a:17), the recognition of solid institutions and governance as a catalyst for sustainable development has resulted in the international community prioritising good governance as an end itself in the development agenda. Good governance is an integral part of the sustainable development vision and its three dimensions, i.e. economic, social and environmental will certainly impact positively internationally on countries, irrespective of whether they are categorised as developed or developing. However, the mantra of good governance, which has been advocated internationally, is more likely to benefit developing countries, more specifically in relation to improved service delivery and an enhanced quality of life for local communities.

The role of local government in the achievement of the SDGs has been highlighted in several quarters internationally. It is envisaged that local government will be critical to the process of attainment of the SDGs as they are at the coalface of service delivery and in direct contact with local communities. Consequently, the notion of *localisation* has to be taken very seriously by the international community and national governments, which have to ensure that there is the required support politically, financially, managerially and technically in a

country context, particularly in developing countries where the provision of basic services is still high on the development agenda. In the final analysis, the global objective of the SDGs is the improvement of the quality of life in local communities, more specifically in a country and continental context, and that should be the driving force in localities. It has also become abundantly clear that the local dimension of development has increasingly become entwined with global and national issues. Presently, human security, climate change, health, employment and migration, are high on the national and international agenda; however, solutions to these challenges over a longer period would necessitate local planning and decision-making, which is an integral part of local governance.

NOTES

1   Making cities/ human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

2   For example 1: poverty reduction; 2: nutrition; 3: health 4: education; 5: gender; 6: water and sanitation; 7: energy; 8: economic growth and employment; 9: infrastructure; 10: inequalities; 12: patterns of consumption and production, including waste management; 13: climate change and resilience; biodiversity; 16: peaceful and inclusive societies and accountable and inclusive institutions; 17: means of implementation, including domestic resource mobilisation, technology and capacity building (UNDP 2014c:7; UNDP 2014g:14).

3   Depending on the decentralisation that is operational, there are distinct stakeholders at the local level, i.e. local communities, community-based organisations and the private sector.

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