

Localizing the SDGs: Regional Perspectives on Decentralized Cooperation

**Findings of the implementation of Learning
Module 4 : Localizing the SDG through
Decentralized Cooperation**

Localizing the SDGs: Regional Perspectives on Decentralized Cooperation

Findings of the implementation of Learning
Module 4 : Localizing the SDG through
Decentralized Cooperation

October, 2022



Supported by:



European Union



Sweden

Sverige

Table of contents

Introduction: The contribution of UCLG Regional Sections

Page 4

Perspective from the African region

Page 8

Perspective from the Asia Pacific (ASPAC) region

Page 11

Perspective from the Latin American region

Page 14

Perspective from the Middle East Western Asia (MEWA) region

Page 17

Perspective from the European region

Page 19

Overviews from Eurasia, the North American region and Metropolis

Page 22



Introduction

With less than eight years to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that all nations have pledged to support in order to realize the 2030 Agenda, **the important contribution of Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) becomes increasingly timely and significant.** At the same time, the trend of cities and regions to look to their peers for networking, knowledge and support, as they grapple with responding to a set of complex urban and local challenges, has also come into the global policy spotlight. It is not surprising therefore, **that the critical role of decentralized cooperation (DC) in implementing and localizing the SDGs warrants serious attention.** In this regard, the Regional Sections of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) have over the years embarked on unique journeys supporting the LRGs to implement and localize the Global Agenda through DC. These journeys, although largely undocumented and without diaries, have contributed significantly to the local governments and municipal movement.

In this summary report, we begin by sharing the key lessons learnt from the practices and perspectives that came up during the rollout of *UCLG's Learning Module 4 "Localizing the SDGs through Decentralized Cooperation"*, implemented in a partnership with UCLG Learning, Platforma and the respective UCLG Regional Section's staff in charge of learning. An early start in the training preparatory process, paying careful attention to selecting participants who are not only directly involved in DC, but willing and able to drive processes, tailor-making training into structured sessions that respond to local and regional needs and allowing sufficient time for active deliberation all stand out as important reflections.

Before providing a quick overview of the various approaches adopted in each of the rollouts, it is useful to reiterate the important role played by the UCLG Regional Sections. For all of them, there was unanimous agreement on the importance of DC and its contribution to universalizing the agenda for LRGs. More than their **general role of lobbying** to ensure that cities and regions remain at the centre of sustainable development and also position in the agenda of Official Development Assistance (ODA), they have emphasized the importance of **building a common language based on solidarity**, and enshrining a set of universal core values. This theme of promoting a **transformative new local and regional diplomacy and building global partnerships** that put citizens at the centre of development is important to note.

Furthermore, Regional Sections all saw themselves as advocates and **catalysts for newer, more equal, empowering and diverse horizontal partnerships -and as active promoters of more South-South and Triangular partnerships in the case of some Sections-**, which would help achieve the SDGs, in particular the SDG Target 17.6. Whilst all Sections remained committed to the



Decentralized Cooperation is in the DNA of our movement

EMILIA SAIZ
UCLG Secretary General

localization of the global 2030 Agenda, it is useful to observe that they are at different stages of rollout and preparedness, with each facing very unique regional challenges.

In the **MEWA region, for example, DC is in its infancy**, given the relative regional instability related to wars, migratory movements, water and food security, etc. Government structures here are also highly centralized, complicated with low municipal capacity, with absence of local government associations and a central intergovernmental union that can dictate and/or promote a regional DC policy framework. Notwithstanding this, DC initiatives forge ahead, with a **focus on mutual learning and the cooperation between cities within the region**, driven by a small, but competent regional team. This differs markedly from the approach adopted **in Europe, with generally much better capacitated municipalities and associations and strong, multiple, global DC initiatives**. The notable trend here is the marked **shift away from the traditional DC model of financial aid towards more sustainable, mutually beneficial and empowering horizontal learning**. The **African and Latin American approaches, whilst sharing a very similar history of colonization, have not necessarily responded uniformly**. They both however have been evolving from a recipient profile of North-South DC to much more complex roles, with **the Latin American region taking the lead in being active contributors of technical cooperation** in exciting South-South and some triangular horizontal partnerships. **The African region** in particular, whilst on this trajectory, **has not yet consolidated its institutional structures to support their new roles, with capacity and finance being severe constraining factors**. However, some African countries are **championing innovations and best practices in the promotion of South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation focusing on concrete local and regional projects**. The **ASPAC region** whilst also facing similar development challenges to the African region in a rapidly urbanizing context, appears to have managed to effectively mobilize regional capacity and are **trailblazers in rolling out UCLG training programs**.

Trends and responses

Even though many DC relations are being aligned, many donors do not consider DC as part of ODA. It is interesting to note that based on global observations and data provided by the OECD, we are able to **predict that horizontal and really committed relationships will be relatively independent from funding and official aid policy**.

It is clear that both **aid funding is declining and that funding decisions follow diplomatic relations that are less predictable**. Looking at the **main beneficiaries of gross bilateral ODA**, we can see that as many as 7 out of the 10 top beneficiary countries of ODA are highly vulnerable, unstable and have weak or no local government. Furthermore, the ODA is distributed to attend emergencies, with social (37%) and humanitarian (17%) assistance making the largest part of aid (including, for example, assistance to refugees).

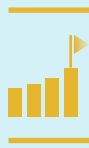
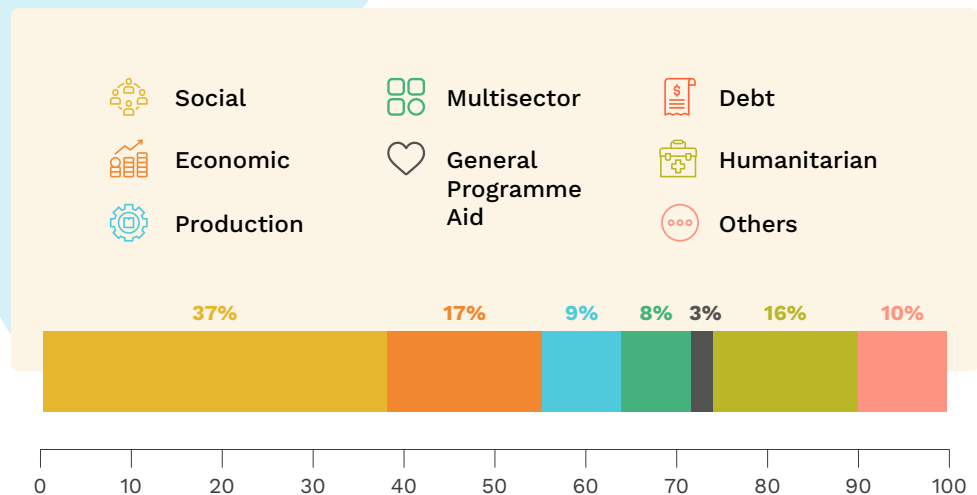


Figure 1
Commitment of ODA to different sectors in 2019

Source: OECD, 2019.



Another important trend observed is the **increased intensity of global connectivity**, given the opportunity of a networking era. Local and regional leaders and officers engage more easily with each other, thematic learning is increasing, with networks opening doors and connecting governments. The challenge, as alluded to earlier, is that as DC project structures have been fluid, **detailed reporting and communication has not been effective**, with many DC partnerships only orally reported. The business aspect of development cooperation is also rich in lessons.

It is anticipated that some of the challenges experienced by LRG and their associations in the regions will be addressed moving forward through advocacy, given the attention drawn to the review of the *CIB Policy Paper on DC* adopted at the UCLG Executive Bureau in June 2022. The Policy Paper clearly outlines six key areas for LRGs and Local Governments Associations (LGAs) to be recognized, engaged, and enabled as strategic actors and partners in development cooperation. Particularly relevant here are the calls for DC to be made more effective, professional and innovative, and the need to engage DC in the financing sphere, given the low levels of municipal capacity and information in this regard.

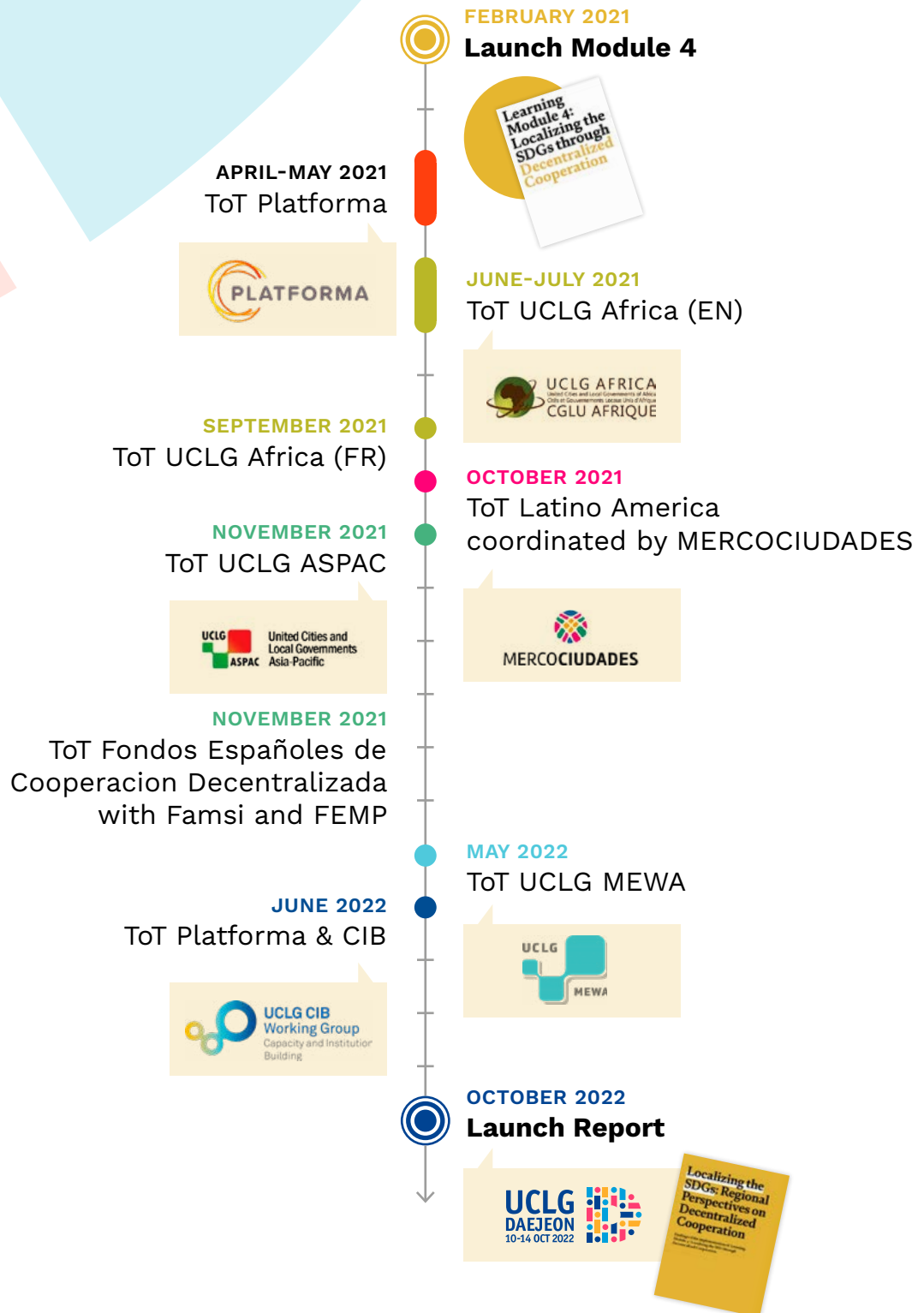
We close this introductory section with a graphical representation that summarizes the timeline of the rollout of *UCLG's Learning Module 4: "Localizing the SDGs through Decentralized Cooperation"* in the Regional Sections, to give a sense of the extent of different phases involved. Whilst the findings of each Regional Section are briefly outlined here, readers are strongly encouraged to read the full reports, as directed with links in each section.



Figure 2

An overview of the rollout of Module 4 "Localizing the SDGs through Decentralized Cooperation" in the regions

Source: UCLG Learning, 2022.





Perspective from the Africa region

The increase in population growth and its corollary, the rapid urbanization of the African continent due to large scale rural-urban movement, have resulted in LRGs finding themselves on the front line in the complex management of migration. Interestingly, this challenge has given rise to numerous **innovations in municipal/regional practices, the involvement of multi-stakeholder actors, and institutional arrangements**, often without the institutional and legal frameworks having prepared them for it. At the same time, LRGs are confronted with the urgent need to transform their economic and business landscapes in order to advance the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, ensure the attractiveness of their territories, transform the potential of their natural assets and their human capital to better employ young people, more effectively integrate women into economic and social life, whilst creating the conditions for international action.

In this context, there can be no doubt that the global agendas offer an important and exciting opportunity for local and regional leadership to join the growing African municipal movement, and in particular for UCLG Africa to play a critical, cohesive and visible role in communicating, expressing challenges and constantly looking for new regional and international partnerships that help move the SDG and the other global agendas (Climate Change, New Urban Agenda, Sendai Framework) as well as the AU Agenda 2063 forward, as LRGs begin to share their emerging local innovations. DC in this sense, is **not only seen as the key enabler but also as an effective lever for the localization process of the SDGs**, given the skill gap in human capital and the limitations in terms of expertise, appropriate digital technologies and finances.



As DC is intrinsically part of development cooperation, one of the strategic thrusts required is the active building of capacity in African LRGs.

UCLG Africa is very clear that the international action and DC initiatives of African LRGs must be oriented towards **the promotion of more egalitarian cooperation relations, more long-term in nature, and more impactful for sustainable development**. As DC is intrinsically part of development cooperation, one of the strategic thrusts required is **the active building of capacity** in African LRGs. DC is clearly no longer about transfer of funding and knowledge, or of the mere implementation

of development projects alone. As showcased in the full *African Report*, the Dakar-Marseille peer learning partnership is a good example of a horizontal DC project that in the true spirit of SDG 17, facilitated the establishment of a multi-stakeholder partnership to unlock and share the knowledge, expertise and financial resources to enable sustainable tourism in Dakar. Similarly, DC initiatives around cultural exchange and education in Blantyre (Malawi), sanitation and environment competitions in the Lake Victoria Region, insights from the public space heritage South-South exchange between Rabat and Dakar, the National Association of Mozambican Municipality (ANAMM)'s experience of south-south cooperation in Mozambique¹, etc. begin to reveal **the inherent value of learning from southern partners grappling similar challenges in similar development contexts**, and also demonstrate the im-

¹For more information, refer to: www.uclg.com



portance of **unlocking and mobilizing human, material and financial resources from both local and international partners** for more sustainable development in Africa. The new initiative from Morocco, through the *African Fund for International Decentralized Cooperation* (FACDI) of local authorities as a unique experience in the continent, is creating a new dynamic in this field, by supporting LRGs and encouraging them to engage in DC for concrete projects (youth employment, women and girls empowerment, capacity building, cultural heritage, digital transformation, health cooperation, etc.). Since 2020, more than 27 projects are supported by the FACDI in 26 LRGs from 12 African countries.

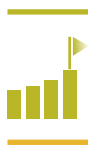
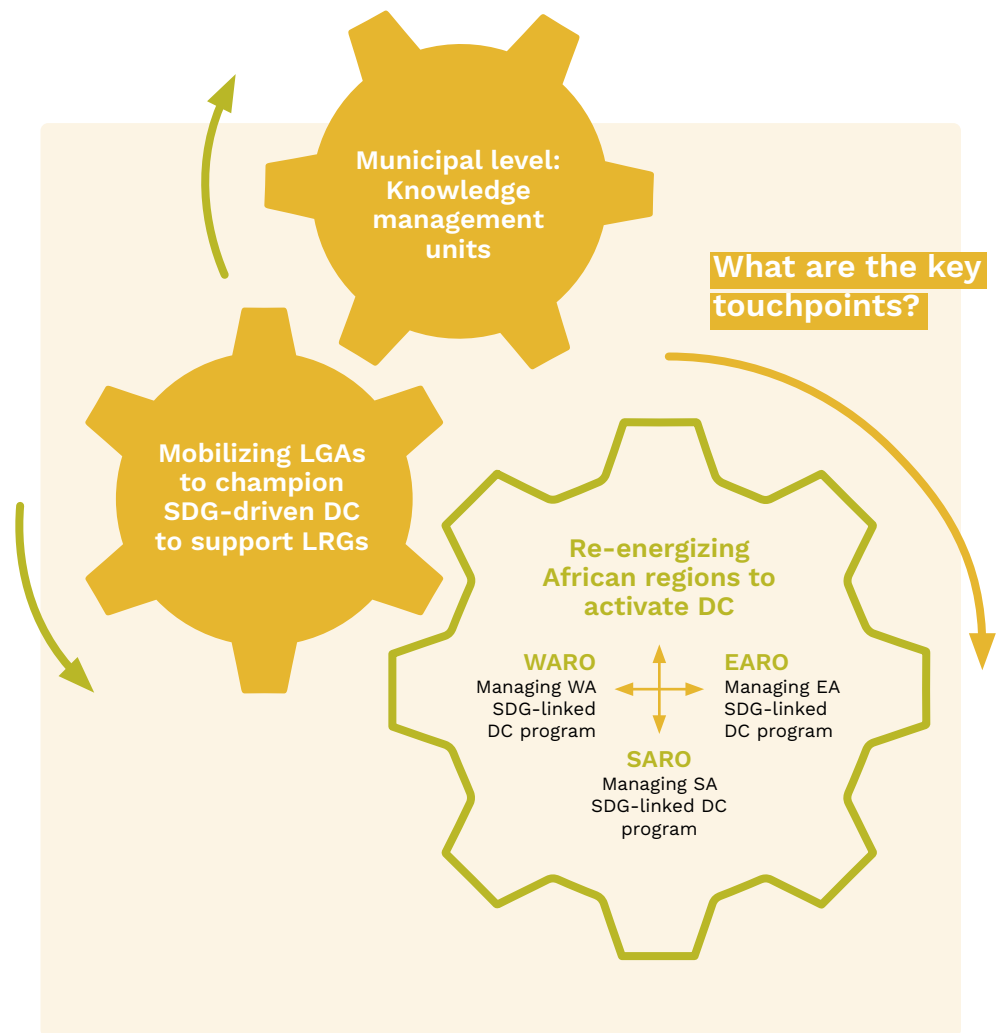


Figure 3
UCLG Africa strategic approach to DC rollout

Source: UCLG Learning, 2021.



From the African approach too, one of the fundamental ways to embed the value of SDG-linked DC is **through intensive capacity building of LRG practitioners**. Recognizing the power of building a regional cadre of DC



ambassadors, UCLG Africa through its African Local Government Academy (ALGA) partnered with UCLG Learning to run an online training of trainers program tailored for the region. Aimed at equipping potential trainers with the tools, knowledge and expertise to implement their own training sessions, a four-day intensive program developed by UCLG, Platforma, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN-Habitat was run during June/July and repeated for French-speaking practitioners in September 2021. About 71 Mayors, Local and Regional elected officials and territorial managers, beside other stakeholders (25 from 12 English speaking countries and 46 from 14 French speaking countries), had the opportunity to benefit from this program.

An assessment of the intervention revealed that the training was well received and achieved its intended outcomes. Whilst the training in itself was important in that it equipped future trainers to roll out the training in their respective countries, more significant is the opportunity that it created for the leadership team from UCLG/UCLG Africa/ALGA to reflect on their current approach to DC in Africa, and to craft a strategic action plan to help embed SDGs in the DC process. Whilst the full details are available in the report, it is useful to highlight the new approach that identifies key touchpoints, starting with the building of Knowledge Management units at the municipal level, mobilizing LGAs to champion SDG-driven DC efforts, and re-energizing the five sub-regions within UCLG Africa to activate DC.

In closing this section on the African region, it is encouraging to note that as a result of the synergy gained during the learning process on DC, UCLG Africa/ALGA has promoted the FACDI during the UCLG Africa Kisumu Summit in May 2022, as an important initiative financed by the Kingdom of Morocco, and co-funded by a Moroccan LRG and a beneficiary LRG from Africa. This event also launched the creation of the African Network of the Territorial Managers in charge of DC (*Réseau des Managers de la Coopération Décentralisée (REMCD) or Network of Decentralized Cooperation Managers (NDCM)*), with representatives of each African sub-region, as a space for networking, peer learning, initiating common projects, and fostering greater collaboration and solidarity, in line with the strategic plan crafted during the SDG-linked DC training workshop.



Perspective from the Asia Pacific (ASPAC) Region

Whilst the East Asia and Pacific region’s average annual urbanization rate of 3 percent has helped lift 655 million people out of poverty in the last two decades, this region has the world’s largest slum population: 250 million people with poor-quality housing, limited access to basic services, and at risk to hazards such as flooding and typhoons. Cities in this most rapidly urbanizing region are not yet delivering infrastructure, jobs, and services at a pace as rapid as urban development, signalling potential widening inequalities that may hamper economic growth and ultimately lead to social division. The latest CIB Policy Paper on DC (2022) recognizes fast urbanizing regions like ASPAC (and the Africa region) as areas of high priority for networks of cities and local governments to focus on.

In attempting to explore the extent to which the ASPAC region has delivered on global targets, the *UN ESCAP Asia and Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021* records the excellent strides made towards achieving 2030 developmental targets, more specifically the socio-economic indicators of the first ten SDGs.

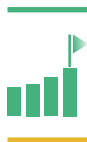
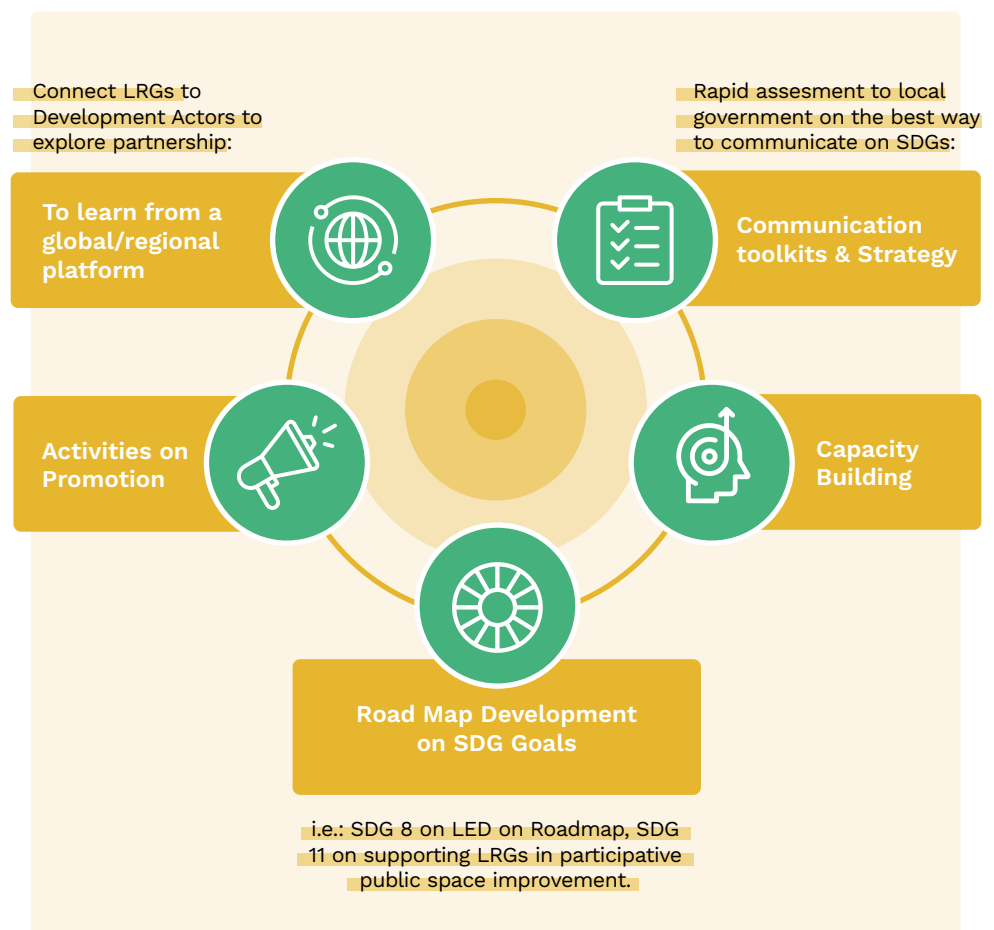


Figure 4
Key elements in localizing SDGs in the ASPAC Region

Source: Tjandradewi, 2016.





However, numerous challenges in achieving the SDGs and implementing DC have been recognized, given the obvious additional strain as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. What stands out from the report, making a strong case for a watertight response to challenges including climate change, is that DC has been used at the heart of sustainable development.

From the experiences articulated by practitioners on the ground, it is clear that DC is indeed where much of the focus of the UCLG ASPAC region lies.²

Their approaches encompass five areas, always commencing with needs assessments done through rapid assessments. Building capacity and actively connecting actors to explore sustainable partnerships are critical for ASPAC, whilst continually communicating and promoting their programs and projects, guided by a clear roadmap for action are critical enablers of the ASPAC's SDG-linked DC approach.



From the experiences articulated by practitioners on the ground, it is clear that DC is indeed where much of the focus of the UCLG ASPAC region lies.

This region has also sought to identify the **focus areas or themes** around which DC has been organized. Here, an important set of issues for cities and local governments themselves reported in a study included poverty reduction, women's empowerment, the local environment, social and cultural concerns, urban infrastructure and services, health and education, employment and economic development, housing and shelter, security and disaster management and

municipal finance (UN-HABITAT & WACLAC, 2003). Obviously, these differ according to location and context, and change over time. The UCLG ASPAC team has been instrumental in **supporting a range of DC projects** that draw on different DC modalities and methodologies effective in the ASPAC context. One such example is the Green Sister City Cooperation between the municipalities of Surabaya (Indonesia) and Kitakyushu (Japan) that joined forces for climate action, aiming to establish a low carbon society and a smart compact city, respectively. Particularly noteworthy in this project is the collaborative approach adopted with the private sector for technical support and capabilities, with research institutions to gain insights, ideas, innovations and feedback regarding implemented projects and with the involvement of communities at the grassroots, including the employment of residents in the project.

Despite the capacity, enthusiasm and clear vision for DC rollout by the UCLG ASPAC team, which is also doing an effort to localize and support the reporting of the SDG progress, a survey conducted by UCLG ASPAC in November 2021 found that nearly 60% of all participants felt that their cities and regions were not in a state of readiness to roll out SDG-linked DC projects and programs. The decision therefore to **build technical capacity** commencing with an online three-day Training of Trainers program that responded to the local needs of the region was timely and equipped officials with the knowledge and expertise to roll out SDG-linked DC in their respective cities and regions. As in other regions, the training also re-energized the UCLG ASPAC team that

²Beyond the focus on climate change, UCLG ASPAC also provides support for LRGs to address public space, SDGs localization and international cooperation.



crafted a plan of action for rollout. In addition to the commitment to gearing greater dedicated capacity to lead SDG-linked DC in the region, the need to build DC collective intelligence at the country level with a focus on embedding knowledge management as a driver for the DC agenda was an important action. A detailed DC program of action was also to be crafted, whilst the ongoing support and enabling of country champions were prioritized. The DC has been accelerated through UCLG ASPAC's various Committees, including the newly established **Human-Development-Peace Nexus**, that support cities and local governments in achieving their prosperities and resiliencies.

The full ASPAC Report can be found [here](#).



Perspective from the Latin American Region

The *UCLG GOLD VI Working Paper Series #12 (2022)* best describes Latin America's **generational, racialized, gender and territorial dimensions of the social** inequalities as kaleidoscopic, with each country having a differential “point of departure” in their inclusionary measures and a shared legacy of pervasive colonial, capitalist, patriarchal and racist systems. This is a useful starting point to acknowledge in a complex region like Latin America, which is **one of the most urbanized on the planet**, with over 82% of the population currently living in towns and cities. The stark inequality of the region expressed in the reality of the richest 1% taking 21% of the regional economy is staggering. Despite the massive inequality reductions during the 2000's, in what is one of the most multiethnic and multicultural regions of the world, racial injustices prevail, even in countries where indigenous population are the majority such as Bolivia and Ecuador or in countries where Afro-descendants are the majority such as Brazil or the Dominican Republic. These **socio-economic inequities directly affect access to adequate housing and territorial vulnerabilities** that cities and regions grapple with, including the provision of basic services and infrastructure such as water and sanitation. And whilst the region represents less than 10% of the global carbon emissions, it remains highly vulnerable to the impact of the climate crisis.

Against this complex regional development context, it is understandable that the narrative of DC as a “source of resources from the North to the South” is to some extent still present, with some practices continuing to be developed under this logic. It is encouraging to note however, a totally new way of understanding DC that is being embedded by LRGs more recently. This **new narrative that is now based on common principles of reciprocity, shared interests, mutual benefits, horizontality, partnership between counterpart partners** (and no longer donors and recipients), **exchange and mutual learning** have inspired many examples of Latin American practice. In

particular, three aspects of DC distinguish Latin America from other cities and associations. These are (i) valorization of direct cooperation between LRGs and their associations that has resulted in their empowerment and strengthening of territorial strategies, (ii) the real commitment of LRGs to involve and actively engage stakeholders in their territory, and (iii) the increased relevance given to the newer DC formats of South/South, South/North, Triangular and networked partnerships.

Whilst this new characterization of DC is positive and an inspiration for other regions, critical challenges still need to be addressed in order to move the DC agenda forward. Some of these include the urgent **need to design strategies to mobilize resources** for DC, based on the specific characteristics of the countries in the region, and the need to strengthen common **initiatives of regional funds for financing DC**, such as the MERCOCIUDADES South-South Cooperation Program. Further, the role of LGAs in building capacity, in particular to small and intermediary cities, clearly depends on national support.



The new narrative is based on reciprocity, horizontality, partnership, mutual learning –and no longer donor and recipients.



Beyond funding related challenges, the move towards **better DC records, data management and indicators**, as well as more effective accountability, monitoring and evaluation processes, is also required. Again, the transition towards the consolidation of the digital component in the DC imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic is key, whilst the **continued strengthening of capacities** (technical, institutional and political) of local administrations and their national and regional associations for DC -particularly to move from the project logic to real DC strategies or policies- cannot be overstated.

It is important to note that, whilst in principle the appreciation of DC as an important instrument for localizing the SDGs in Latin America is shared (to varying extents) by national governments, LRGs and their associations, in practice DC currently faces the **challenge of becoming an effective localizing regional tool**. The full *Latin American Report* unpacks some of the conditions and factors that need urgent attention. These include the crafting of workable and clear roadmaps for implementation, moving away from the silo-based to a cross-cutting approach; deepening current engagement of stakeholders, particularly from the private sector; fully embracing multi-level articulation that establishes responsibilities and capacities for the levels of state and actors from civil society and the private sector and the need to develop better instruments and methodologies for DC data collection, systematization and recording.

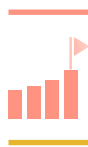
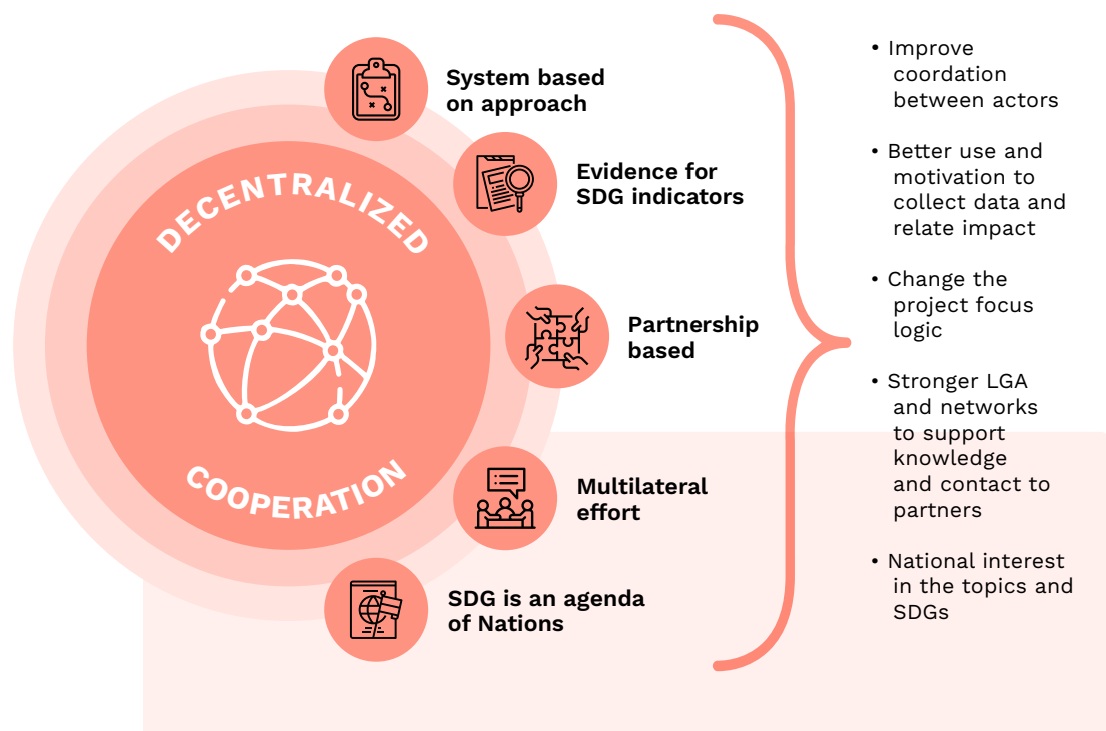


Figure 5

SDGs as a vehicle to shift DC from project to partnership approach

Source: UCLG, 2022.





Like other Regional Sections, **the value of developing capacities** of LRG practitioners in Latin America through the implementation of the online Training of Trainers workshop on Learning Module 4 in partnership with UCLG Learning has been greatly appreciated. In particular, **the interactive, hands-on methodology and experiential learning that focussed on real-life case studies** based on lessons from South-South DC experiences helped reinforce the relevance of this cooperation modality. The showcasing of practical projects – from the case of the Food Surplus Network (Belo Horizonte, Quito, Medellin and New Taipei), highlighting one of the Latin American priority issues around the need for effective food policies, to the South-South technical DC experience of the Chilean Association of Municipalities with Amazonian communities in Peru in the field of renewable energy and water, showing how LRGs in the region can jointly address global agenda issues such as climate change – inspired participants to what was possible in the region.

As in other regions, the training was an **important catalyst to develop a strategic action plan** to help more effectively integrate SDGs into the DC process in Latin America. The detailed actions for the regional sections and the UCLG are outlined in the full report.



Perspective from the Middle East Western Asia (MEWA) region

The *UCLG Middle East Position Paper* categorizes development challenges faced by the region based on the **inherent factors of wars, conflicts, migratory movements and limited resources**. At the forefront of inherent challenges, however, lie social diversities and issues of governance. Whilst the people in the Middle-eastern countries identify with each other culturally, linguistically and historically, it is important to note that the way of life of people in West Asia differs significantly. Even though **fragmented social cohesion** appears to be a soft issue, the magnitude of its impact is intense. In setting the development context here, it is useful to appreciate that administratively, government structures in this region, unlike others, are highly centralized and in turn limit LRGs from exercising any kind of full autonomy, especially in finances and urban governance. Furthermore, the impacts of centralization often result in the unequal distribution of essential services, taking away the attention from other priorities and fulfilment of other agendas such as gender-sensitive approaches (*Middle East Position Paper, 2019*). Another compelling issue is that, over the years, **climate change** has continued to increase its intensity. It challenges the well-being of the environment, ravaging ecosystems and threatening communities. The prevalence of rising sea levels, erratic weather patterns, and overall environmental degeneration are some of the deep-rooted impacts of this complex issue manifesting in the MEWA region.

As acknowledged in the full *UCLG-MEWA Report*, whilst overwhelming at times, these complex development challenges are seen as an opportunity by the Regional Section to galvanise LRGs for action. DC is viewed as a powerful mechanism not only to begin to grapple with these challenges but also as a **vehicle for localizing the global agenda**. It is important to highlight, however, that DC is still very much in its infancy, compared with other regions. Whereas World War II served as an important catalyst in European cities prompting numerous city-to-city exchanges, the same effect was not felt in the MEWA region. Here, the focus is **predominantly on mutual learning, and most of the cooperation happens between cities within the region**. Generally, most municipalities in the region have very limited capacity, and like other developing regions, have little human resources available to dedicate for DC initiatives. Further exacerbating this challenge is the **lack of LGAs** in the region to actively champion DC efforts, as is being done in other regions. This is a concern that informs the need for practical and realistic learning strategies, in a region where **generalizations cannot be easily made**, as each country is itself unique, with its own history, context and particular challenges.

Given this unique context, international institutions and agencies such as UCLG-MEWA, international financial institutions, and national and international development agencies play a much bigger role compared to other regions in supporting municipalities DC programs. **UCLG-MEWA itself has been the driving force to promote DC in the region** as part of its mandate, actively facilitating and encouraging many DC projects. The Regional Section, in the absence of LGAs, is the first point of contact and



plays a critical bridging role. Utilizing a database of municipal needs and priorities, it extends assistance to respective cities and plays a brokering role between cities in the region. Awareness-raising efforts of SDG localization have been identified as important amongst governments and communities, hence the utilization of the SDG framework as a common platform for DC between cities in the region has been key to MEWA’s strategic approach.



There are many good practice examples in the Mewa region. What has been lacking is the documentation and global sharing.

One of the reflections arising from the rollout of Module 4 led by UCLG-MEWA and supported by UCLG Learning, is that despite the many challenges experienced, there are **many good practice examples of DC initiatives. What has been lacking is the documentation and active global sharing of such experiences.** They include wide ranging projects from a BRT system in Lahore supported by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, to developing

proactive cultural strategy development in the Kütahya Municipality, with support of Pecs Municipality and UNESCO; from UMT Sister Cities programs that mobilize EU funds to technical know-how exchanges on water management between the Istanbul Water and Sewerage Administration and Palestinian Cities mobilizing multiple partners from APLA, UMT and UCLG-MEWA. Such facilitation by different stakeholders have been instrumental in the creation of building trusted ties.

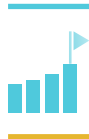
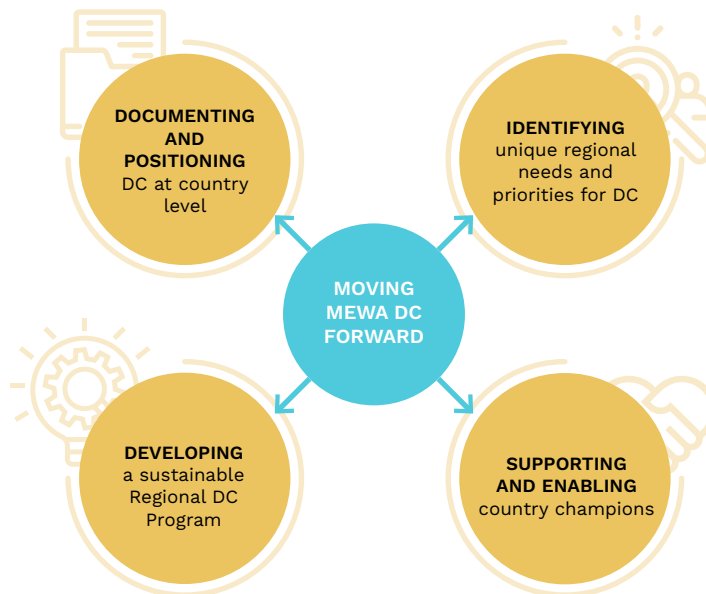


Figure 6
Rolling out SDG-linked DC in the MEWA region

Source: Urban Vision, 2022.



The rollout program (as captured in Figure 6), presented an opportunity for the UCLG-MEWA team to strategize around a three-year program of action, based on needs identification, supporting countries to better document their practices and enabling their DC champions, as detailed in the full regional report.



Perspective from the European region

As a point of departure, we note that DC for LRGs within the EU is **not essentially different from DC in other regions**: the diversity of practices, priorities, modalities and ways of working and methodologies are a reflection of what is happening at the global level. Interestingly however, the fact that Europe is a donor of DC has resulted in a particular scenario for diverse actors. Many LRGs are donors of DC or seed fund initiatives to be supported further, with LRGs and associations becoming accountable for the DC projects. **The European tradition, rooted mainly in ODA, has been updated with the SDGs among the different manifestations of DC.** Notwithstanding the importance of this global agenda, it remains in many of the institutions that were created to support DC in Europe. This includes having a basis in **official financial support to DC initiatives with a focus on economic development.** Throughout the process of shifting development perspectives to consider sustainability as a fundamental axis of development (embodied in the SDGs), funding institutions and actor-agents of European DC have clearly redefined ODA today.

The reader is directed to the [full text of the *European Report*](#), which focuses on the European conception of “decentralized development cooperation”, emphasizing financial cooperation, North-South, as a starting point for the current analysis of the dominant type of DC in the region, as well as the networking North-North approach. The full report makes the point that European DC operates in a **clear framework that organizes the exchange of knowledge and learning.** Central to the framework is the cooperation of LRGs playing a fundamental facilitation role that aligns with and embeds itself within EU programs, helping to build capacities for DC. The **creation of thematic networks** coordinated and financed by LRGs themselves is also foreseen in the framework. Whilst this has not yet been fully realized, the European-based DC funding has morphed towards progressively providing funding to networks of cities and even networks of cooperation of cities within the European Union (URBACT). Europe is looking to other global regions to find solutions to complex challenges like climate change, the greatest and most shared planetary threat, but also job creation, peace and security, the digital deal and migration as the five key priorities for the 2021-2027 period. It is here that **DC is seen as a critical tool to establish learning vectors between LRGs across the North and South.**

An important observation from this region is that, whilst there is an **extraordinarily wide diversity of practices and ways of working** (different modalities and instruments, actions of greater or lesser volume, preferences for one or other forms of channelling, alliances and partnerships, financing options, etc.), such diversity clearly **responds, to a significant degree, to the formalization of DC as public policy.** Hence, unlike other regions, the extent to which DC promoted by non-central administrations is recognized by the legal and institutional frameworks of each State makes it possible to grant this activity greater or lesser legal capacity and financial autonomy.

It is clear that the EU has made tremendous strides in determining the most efficient way to channel funds to promote and consolidate DC. The lesson



The European Region places great emphasis on the importance of monitoring and reporting results also generated by the beneficiaries or development partners themselves.

over time has confirmed the **importance of networks and associations** as a major player in this field, and they have **increased their capacity, their knowledge as well as interest in finding the most efficient ways of financial monitoring of projects**, providing support in management and in the scope of involving many actors. **The Platforma coalition represents the common effort of a diversity of DC actors** (federations, local/regional government associations, cooperation funds, as well as individual local individuals, provincial and local governments) to increase this European support to DC, in its different expressions, possessing a unique repository of knowledge to support the localization of the SDGs -including, logically, DC. Having acknowledged this, we discern that the **implementation of effective SDG-linked DC has been very uneven** amongst European LRGs, and in some cases has been limited to merely facilitating access to technical and financial resources.

The European Region places great emphasis on the **importance of monitoring and reporting results**, highlighting the general idea of prioritizing the **use of evidence and data not only oriented to the SDGs, but also generated by the beneficiaries or development partners themselves**. They value the integration of the SDGs into DC policies that help reinforce the principles of cooperation effectiveness -especially ownership and alignment with the development priorities of development partners-, a clear focus on results, and transparency and mutual accountability, as well as the increased cooperation and solidarity between LRGs and their diverse stakeholders.

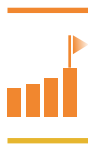
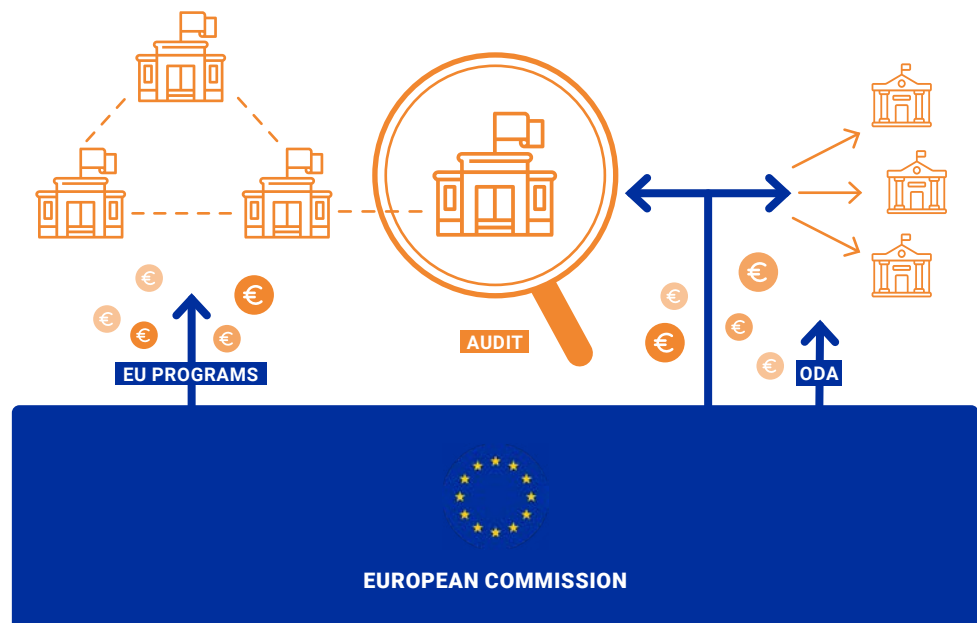


Figure 7

LRGs' task accumulation on own and EU co-funding reporting

Source: UCLG Learning, 2022.



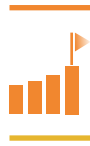
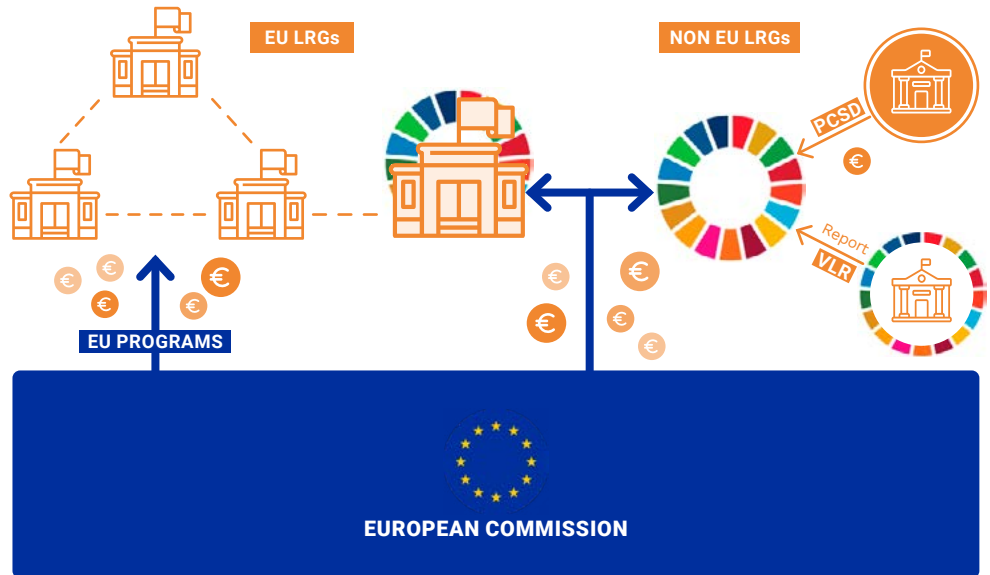


Figure 8

Need to increase direct reporting from beneficiary non-EU LRGs

Source: UCLG Learning, 2022.



The full report which features the case of Ostende (Belgium)–Banjul (Gambia) partnership for sustainable development, in which many challenges of the project are shared by both partners (e.g. waste management, sea level rise in coastal areas, etc.) clearly demonstrates how **mutual interest reinforces the strength of the DC initiative**. The showcasing of the VVSG (Belgium) and SALGA (South Africa) municipal policy-making DC project -which is a good example of LGAs collaboration-, highlights the key lessons of (i) **deeply understanding the complexities of each party's local politics**, which is necessary to ensure DC project success, (ii) **developing mutual trust between players from the North and South**, as projects are ultimately developed between people and not only entities, and (iii) **dedicating time in the initial phases to focused problem definition**.



Overviews from Eurasia, the North American region and Metropolis

Whilst formal SDG-linked DC training on Module 4 has not yet commenced in Eurasia and the North American region, therefore not allowing reflections to be included in this report, a brief outline of their approaches are offered below. We also present a summary on the approach to DC adopted by Metropolis.

01 Decentralized Cooperation in the Eurasia Region

In the countries of the Eurasia region, the interaction and cooperation of municipalities is carried out mainly through associations of local governments aimed at pooling resources to address issues of local importance and exchange practical information. Inter-municipal and decentralized cooperation is implemented both within the country and in the international context through:

- the participation of cities in international associations,
- the conclusion of contracts and agreements on foreign economic and cross-border cooperation with foreign municipalities,
- the establishment of friendly (sister-city) relations, etc.



Like UCLG-MEWA, many Eurasian countries have a high level of centralization of power. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, there are no national associations of local governments.

Cities of Eurasia actively engage in the activities of UCLG-Eurasia, the International Assembly of Capitals and Large Cities, the International Association "Sister Cities" and other organizations. While the twinning concept is very important for the long term relations of city actors, in Russia, for the purpose of ensuring intermunicipal collaboration, as well as expressing and protecting common interests of municipalities, in each region there are councils of municipalities of the region of the Russian Federation. Further, it is useful to note that like UCLG-MEWA, many Eurasian countries have a high level of centralization of power. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, there are no national associations of local governments.

The problem of climate change has been increasingly discussed in the Eurasian space in recent years. Most of the Arctic is in Eurasia, and the thawing of permafrost could lead to detrimental consequences not only for the region, but for the entire planet. This problem is especially relevant for Eurasia, because 65% of the territory of Russia is permafrost, and the glaciers of Tajikistan play an important role in the life of Central Asia, providing the region with water reserves.

UCLG-Eurasia, as an international organization that unites cities and associations of local governments of Eurasian countries, is the driving force that promotes decentralized cooperation between Eurasian cities on the most topical issues today. In 2021, the Eurasia Local Governments Congress was organized in Yakutsk, around the threat of melting glaciers to the region and the world. In addition, a round table focussed on waste management which



is a global challenge that the region is attempting to find creative solutions to address.

UCLG-Eurasia has developed recommendations for LRG related to climate and has presented best practices of cities from around the world that developed climate plans and also played a seminal role in awareness-raising activities among LRGs, organizing training seminars on localizing the SDGs.

02 Decentralized Cooperation in the North American (NORAM) Region

In Canada and the United States, like in many other nations, local governments and regions play a key role in how our countries fare on the global stage, and finding solutions to some of the most pressing global challenges, including economic and social consequences of this pandemic, which brings with it a host of complex and intertwined crises. In this section, a brief overview of the work done in the NORAM region, led by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) is outlined. National initiatives and priorities addressing the Sustainable Development goals are connected to international work and to decentralized cooperation.

In response to the increasing inequality in Canada, addressing SDG target 11.1, (access to affordable housing), the federal-municipal [Rapid Housing Initiative](#), created mid-pandemic through advocacy of the FCM, is helping Canadian communities create housing for at least 9,200 Canadian vulnerable households—by repurposing available buildings and lands.

Canadian Women in Local Leadership is empowering local leaders and community partners to promote gender parity and diversity on municipal councils. And the Community Economic Development Initiative is supporting partnerships between First Nations and municipalities—fostering sustainable prosperity while laying foundations for reconciliation.

Internationally, FCM is actively supporting the advocacy on local governments and their associations, which has been a crucial contribution of UCLG to SDG localization and to a just recovery. Besides, it continues to deliver capacity building programs internationally:

For the FCM, it is clear that their unique peer-to-peer approach leads to tangible impacts because it allows elected officials, municipal staff, and technical experts to work with their counterparts, using the common language of hands-on collaboration. FCM's [PMI-WILL](#), for example, aims to increase women's capacity to take on leading roles in their local government and at the same time enable those local governments to deliver inclusive, gender-responsive services.

Canadian municipalities and associations who take part in FCM's international projects come back with a new perspective on their own municipal context and energized to try to solve old problems



Canadian municipalities and associations who take part in FCM's international projects come back with a new perspective on their own municipal context and energized to try to solve old problems with new solutions.



with new solutions. One of the biggest challenges for municipalities around the world is climate change. We know that the most vulnerable –isolated communities, underserved populations, women, children– are inevitably most affected by its impacts. Canada’s government, through its’ Global Affairs Canada department, created a new [Partnering for Climate](#) fund to address this complex challenge.

FCM is currently looking at how best to align future international programs with this new source of funding. Designing projects at the nexus where climate and gender intersect makes a lot of sense. It leverages the extensive expertise we developed over the years through the [Green Municipal Fund](#) and applies our well-honed gender lens.

It is important to note that as a sign of trust and partnership, Global Affairs Canada funds these FCM initiatives, which give Canada’s local elected officials and municipal staff opportunities to hone intercultural communication and project management skills while sharing best practices, building capacity and forging lasting business ties. These programs demonstrate that LGR and associations play a significant role in helping Canada contribute to Sustainable Development Goals.

03 Metropolis and its role in supporting Decentralized Cooperation

Major metropolises are globally connected and they have the ability to structure and galvanise the territories around them at a local, national and regional scale. As a result, the economic, social, cultural and environmental transformations in the last two decades have led to profound new territorial reorganisation processes ranging from new patterns for the location of urban activity to the appearance of significant changes in the role of metropolitan areas. A spatial reconfiguration is underway in which the metropolitan and urban scales must coexist, and the old divisions and hierarchies between city

and nature, urban and rural, centre and periphery, are shifting rapidly. This process will have a major impact on large cities and the surrounding territories. Metropolises grapple with the challenge of striking a balance to prioritise global issues while respecting the autonomy of each neighbourhood, town and city that makes up the metropolis.

The Metropolitan governments usually count on an international relation office who connects and redirects requests for cooperation and serves as the first point of contact within the local authority. The offices oversee and accompany cooperation projects that are usually co-funded by the cities, and frequently outsourced for the implementation, as many metropolitan governments benchmark certain practices and

the departments in charge cannot invest time to cooperate. Another way of promoting their lessons is through dedicated training institutes for staff and other LRG.



The Metropolitan governments usually count on an international relation office who connects and redirects requests for cooperation and serves as the first point of contact within the local authority.

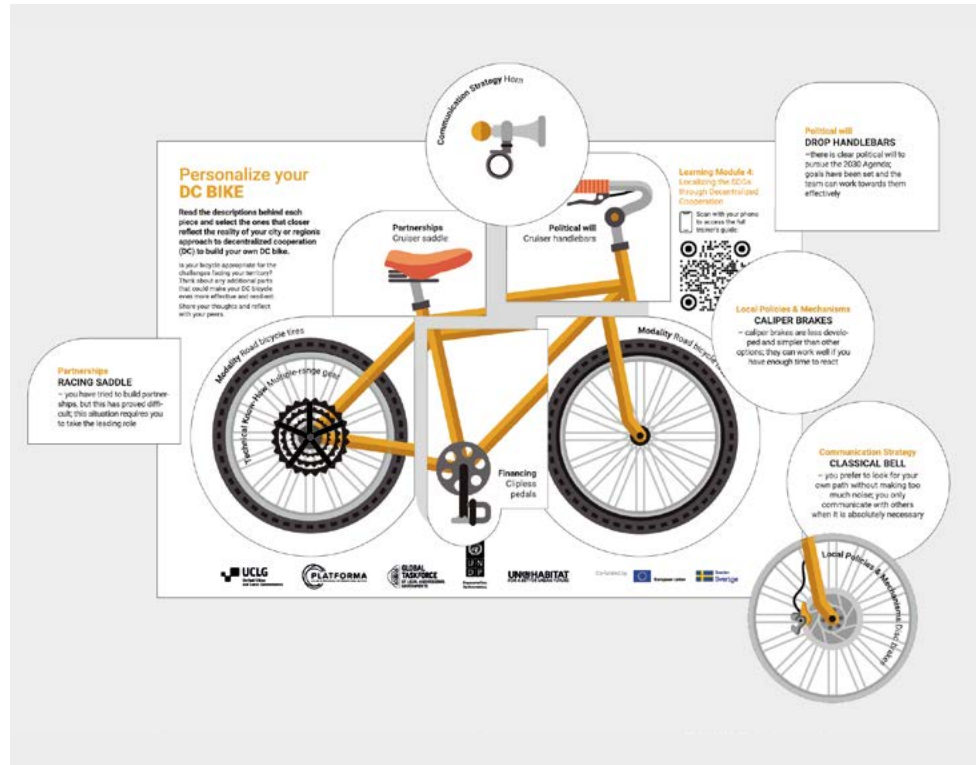


Metropolises can join a network of cities facing similar problems; Metropolis, guided by core values such as gender mainstreaming and SDG for the work they do together and how they relate to one another. Metropolis provides Peer Learning opportunities to the practitioners and international relation offices. Those can have the format of a simple webinar, a working group that meets on a regular basis to discuss a specific common issue, or a knowledge-sharing platform, to name a few:

- **City-to-city learning exchanges:** [led by the Brussels-Capital Region](#) in collaboration with Medellín, Montreal, Seoul Metropolitan Government and Barcelona Metropolitan Area, aimed to exchange experiences on the future of public metropolitan spaces.
- **Learning Hubs:** A collaboration of mutual interest whose objective is to explore a topic of priority for the member and for the Metropolis network. This two-way collaboration can include a third partner to enrich the content and exchanges.
- **Learning through action:** "Moving towards recovery: Bogotá's transport system as a catalyst for environmental sustainability and gender equality in the post-COVID-19 era" is a three-year project to be implemented in Bogotá, Colombia, from April 2022 to March 2025.
- **AVANTIA** is a collaborative effort presented by Metropolis, the Bogota and Madrid City Councils and ISGlobal. The project is co-funded by the European Union.



Next activities of UCLG Learning and Platforma



Given much interest in the Module 4 rollout and methodology, the UCLG Learning team and Platforma will prepare an online learning tool that will be available in the platform **#LearningWithUCLG**.



Acknowledgements

Coordination

UCLG Learning

Key Partners

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), PLATFORMA, and all the other regional sections: UCLG Africa, UCLG ASPAC, MERCOCIUDADES and FLACMA, UCLG MEWA, UCLG Eurasia, UCLG North America and Metropolis.

Authors

Sogen Moodley (lead), María del Huerto (regional) and Joan Cortes (regional) as well as the learning focal points of the regional sections.

Design

roig/studio

This document summarizes regional lessons that can be found on the websites of the UCLG Regional Sections and UCLG Learning.

