

REGIONAL INITIATIVE TEMPLATE

Please complete each section below.

1. Contact Details

Please provide the following contact details:

Name of individual or group submitting initiative	<i>Commonwealth Local Government Forum Pacific</i>
Name and position of primary contact	<i>Karibaiti Taoaba, Regional Director</i>

2. Name of Initiative

Decentralisation and Local Governance

3. Background and Rationale

You may consider: What is the issue being addressed by this initiative? What are the causes of this issue? Are there relevant studies that have been carried out to support the issue? Are there links to national, regional or international goals/policies?

Please limit your response to no more than 750 words.

SECTION 3: BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE [[No more than 750 words]

1. What is the issue being addressed by the initiative?

The main issue being addressed through this submission relates to the lack of recognition and attention accorded to the potential role of decentralisation and local government¹ in delivering sustainable and equitable development at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Local government in the Pacific is mandated with constitutional (in one or two cases) and legal responsibility for providing services for the wellbeing of citizens in the respective countries and territories. Part of this mandate requires local government for ensuring the economic, social and environmental development of the area and territory under its jurisdiction. With that mandate local government in the Pacific is a fundamental actor for achieving sustainable development and poverty reduction goals and strategies by tackling priority challenges such as education, health, climate change and environment, disaster and risk reduction, food security, wealth creation, livelihood, infrastructure, rapid urbanization, etc.

Recent studies and reports have argued that the complex challenges to achieve sustainable development goals and poverty alleviation cannot be addressed exclusively by central governments. It is an undisputable fact that the process of development requires the active participation of all the relevant actors. Indeed, there is an increasing demand by communities across the globe that they should be of the formulation and implementation of development strategies and strategies.

Despite the strong arguments recognising local government as a key development actor and partner, and more

¹ The term local government is being used here very broadly to refer to the 'tier or tiers of government below that of national government, i.e. at sub-national level'.

appropriately suited to operate close to citizens (principle of subsidiarity) and mandated by law to provide and deliver a wide range of public services to the community, its complete involvement in the development process is still yet to be fully realized.

In the last two decades, many central governments in developing countries including the Pacific have devolved responsibilities to local government. There is widespread acceptance of the limits of centrally-led, top-down development policies and programmes. Central government cannot alone succeed in addressing the complexities of sustainable development and combating poverty.

This recognition signals the importance of promoting participatory and inclusive decision-making processes, as well as the definition and formulation of strategic development plans based on the expressed needs of the local communities, as well as the increased efficiency in the delivery of basic services at local level on the basis of subsidiarity principle. Participatory and inclusive decision-making inevitably will lead to ownership of the development process at local level by the communities themselves and at the same time will become more transparent and accountable for their decisions and actions.

Increasingly also, local government are now responding to emergencies affecting local communities such as rapid urbanisation, food security, depletion of resources, public safety, climate change and environmental protection, disaster response and rehabilitation, etc.

2. What are the causes of the issue?

A major consideration in the lack of attention is, in many respects, to do with the fact that local government is 'a creature' of central government which in the Pacific Island states were established by law. In most cases therefore, local government is often mistakenly regarded as an extension of and treated just like an ordinary department or agency of central government.

This attitude and understanding, however flawed as it is, has generally led to the creation of a 'dependency' mentality on the part of local government on one hand, and a 'leader-follower' syndrome on the part of central government. Naturally, these perspectives have serious consequences on the relationship between central and local government. Inevitably, however, they restricted or otherwise, smothered the creativity and innovativeness of local institutions. Recall that local government in the Pacific, as a modern local leadership institution, was an attempt by colonial governments, in the majority of cases, to merge with or otherwise replace traditional leadership institutions. And, traditional leadership institutions have always been autonomous and self-sustaining despite the hostile socio-political and economic environment in pre-colonial days.

Additionally, the apparent lack of 'own development' in rural and local areas may have also contributed to the current thinking that local government needed a lot of guidance and support from central government. There may some truth in that assertion but it does not mean that local government does not have the potential to be an active actor and partner in development if given the means and tools.

Even then, the recognition of the key role of local government in delivering development, has not always been accompanied by an adequate level of autonomy, capacity development and financial resources, thus leaving their empowerment incomplete.

The neglect and status of local government in the Pacific, in many respects, is well reflected by the Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister, Hon. Peter O'Neil in his Keynote Address to the 4th Pacific Local Government Forum, held in Port Moresby in May 2014. In his address he made reference to the poor status of local government in the Papua New Guinea context:

"Until quite recently local government was neglected, underfunded, and often side-lined...essentially, lip-service was paid to it resulting in the whole system declining seriously..."

These sentiments, although made in reference to the PNG context, are not peculiar to PNG alone, but also reflective of the general status of local government in the Pacific. The scenario is a common feature faced by local governments in the region. The Hon. Peter O'Neill has, however, taken the bull by the horn, so to speak, and expressed the problem more explicitly and in no uncertain terms!

In addition, as a matter of policy and practice, development assistance has mainly been delivered through central government agencies and/ or civil society organisations (CSOs). Resources directly channelled through local government represented a limited part of development assistance.

The shift in thinking has prompted development partners and donor agencies to move towards a new development approach which builds on local knowledge to define public policy through deliberate and locally-based processes which may stand a better chance of delivering on the global goals and targets such as the MDGs and the new SDGs.

3. Are there relevant studies that have been carried out to support the issue?

The literature on the role and functions of local government is extensive. Ironically, the literature on local government in the Pacific is sparse. Of interest, there is a perceived rise in local government literature following the implementation of the MDGs and the negotiations for a new global development framework.

Local government is currently in the limelight given its potential role in the new global development framework. Many developing and donor countries facing the challenges of sustainable and inclusive development and poverty reduction have acknowledged the potential role of local government as a key development partner and actor.

Since the 1990s local government has increasingly been viewed as a key player in development policy. For example, the European Consensus on Development, the revised Cotonou Agreement and a number of EU institutions' Conclusions, Resolutions and Opinions reiterate local government 'significant expertise, not only in terms of service delivery, but also as catalysts for change, conflict prevention, decentralisation and confidence-building in the development process'.

The assertion is that local government brings unique added value to the development processes. In addition, local government is key to mobilising different stakeholders at local level to work together, thus generating collaborative approaches for attaining common development goals. Also, local government is also a keen communicator for development (increasing public awareness and rallying additional support for development).

And, due to their proximity and territorial presence, as well as knowledge of local needs and expertise in traditional sectors conducive to poverty reduction – urbanisation, water and sanitation, assistance to vulnerable groups and poor populations in remote areas – local government has the potential to maximising the effects of development assistance by bilateral and multilateral donor institutions.

Local government has direct experience of and valuable skills in territorial development, decentralisation and strengthening democratic governance. The evolution in the concept and delivery of development assistance has further increased the focus on good governance and democratisation, processes in which local authorities play a central role. This has been paralleled by increased representation of EU local authorities on the international political scene and in their aid activities.

In brief, local government plays a pivotal role in delivering local development and exercise of local leadership, because of its democratically elected status and its overarching remit in the locality. Broadly, there are five clear roles for local government to play in the development and exercise of local leadership:

- as convenor,
- strategist,
- communicator,
- protector of democratic accountability, and
- exemplar of good practice.

It is also important to emphasise that this new thinking brings with it new opportunities and challenges. A few of these

are highlighted to provide perspective and insight in what is to be expected!²

- emphasises the particular responsibilities that democratically elected local government has in governing, including balancing contested community priorities, managing conflicts, brokering agreement, offering a strategic perspective and pursuing the public good (sometimes in opposition to community demands)
- acknowledges that local government cannot achieve these aspirations alone but is dependent upon securing the cooperation of other actors (public, private, voluntary and community) through the exercise of influence in its relationships with them
- highlights the unique capacity of local government to provide a platform for a course of action proposed by one or more stakeholders and to facilitate wider community awareness, deliberation and support
- considers effective leadership to be 'distributed leadership', that is, present in individuals across all sectors and at all levels, and associated with institutions (local government, strategic partnerships) as well as individuals.

4. Are there links to national, regional and international goals/ policies?

The proposed initiative to integrate or otherwise give emphasis, where and when appropriate in regional public policies, to decentralisation and local governance because of the potential role of local government in facilitating and effecting sustainable and equitable development.

The proposal is directly linked to national, regional and international policies and goals. It is a known fact that sustainable development would only take place if all citizens of the Pacific have access to basic services and employment opportunities. And, it is also a fact that the majority of Pacific people are still living in rural hamlets, settlements and villages.

This is not denying the fact that urbanization is a growing major challenge for all Pacific islands and urban councils which leading the charge of mitigating the issues are already struggling to deliver decent basic services to rate payers and urban dwellers.

A number of regional policies on education, health, environment and climate change, renewable energy, disaster and risk reduction, water and sanitation, infrastructure, wealth creation through local economic development etc., are all the responsibilities of local government. Indeed, in many of these regional projects, local governments are at the forefront on of any intervention strategy.

4. Description

Please provide a brief overview of this initiative. Try to address the following: Does this initiative contribute to a positive change to the region? What makes this initiative of importance to the Pacific region as a whole? Who would implement this initiative? Who are the main beneficiaries? Are regulatory or legislative changes required at the national level to implement this initiative? How would the initiative be funded? Has this initiative been carried out previously? What are the key risks in implementing this initiative? Are there any complementary projects and programmes currently active? What is the proposed timeframe for this initiative? How would the initiative be sustained over the proposed timeframe?

² Adapted from Sullivan and Sweeting, 2005: 35

Please limit your response to no more than 750 words.

1. Does this initiative contribute to a positive change to the region?

The proposed initiative will, in time and without doubt, contribute towards the fulfilment of national, regional and global development goals provided that the current constraints and challenges faced by local government are adequately addressed and removed;

With local government becoming an equal partner and actor in national development, local communities would be taking ownership of their own development and at the same time becoming accountable for their decisions and actions or non-actions;

The delivery of crucial services contributing to the achievement of national, regional and global goals (such as the MDGs) is not possible without the involvement and participation of effective and responsive local institutions that are closer to local communities and grass-root people who are better placed to address their needs;

In the evaluation of the performance of the MDGs and the negotiation process to formulate the Post-2015 Development Agenda many new lessons were learned. At the same time new challenges were identified which threaten the development opportunities of developing countries and small island states. Amongst the most critical threats are the global financial crisis, urbanisation, climate change, and food security.

The situation, however, is gradually changing. Aid donors and development partners have become interested in the potential of local government to leverage development. That interest is evident in the discussions and outcomes of international fora on development.

For example, the 2011 Busan Declaration affirms the role of local governments in assuring a broad-based and democratic ownership of countries' development agenda. Also, the 2012 Rio +20 Summit Outcome Statement acknowledges for the first time the role of local and regional governments play in the sustainable development agenda.

Of significance, the 2012 Report of the UN *"High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda - A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development"* in its recommendations places local government squarely at the forefront of both the delivery and monitoring of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Furthermore, the launching of the 2013 EC Communication on *"Empowering Local Authorities in Partner Countries for Enhanced Governance and more Effective Development Outcomes"* signals an important new direction for the EU with respect the role that local government, as a key state actor, should play in development. This new direction by the EU is consistent with development elsewhere, and especially at the global level.

At the regional level, there is little evidence that local government has been given due recognition as having the potential to leverage development and improve the delivery of basic services at local and community level. If there was, perhaps the recognition is in part due to the role of local and village communities and traditional governance. But, these references are usually made in the context of the overall responsibilities of national governments. The approach to dealing with all development strategies, whether they are national or local concerns, has been and continues to be through national governments. The prevalent theoretical dogma is the sovereignty of the nation-state, and as such, anything to do with internal national interests has to be left to national governments including anything to do with local government. Scarcity of resources and lack of managerial and technical capacity, in the most part, contribute to the prevailing practice of doing things!

2. What makes the initiative of importance to the Pacific region as a whole?

Extensive experiences and insights gained and lessons learned over the past decades from national, regional and global development initiatives and fora, academic research and studies have demonstrated that centrally- controlled and top-down development policies have not delivered to expectations.

At the global level, we have the MDGs which is being phased out and to be replaced by the new Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs). Lessons learned from the pursuits of the MDGs underscored the role of local government in delivering on both local and national objectives, and the need for local targets to feed into national development strategies.

During the first phase of the consultations for the Post-2015 Development Agenda (spearheaded by UNDG since 2012) showed that there was convergence of opinions regarding what people see as necessary for their future. Participants agree that the future development agenda should cover fundamental development areas that are still critically important. They also emphasize the need to tackle inequality, to protect the environment, and to strengthen governance and accountability to measure progress on development targets.

The consultations also highlighted an important new dimension to the design of the SDGs. The participants were keen not only to express their views on the content of the agenda, but were also interested in how it will be implemented, including the specific roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders.

The formulation of the new SDGs has not only attempted to identify what critical development issues needed to be included in the new SDGs, but also spell the means of implementing these global goals and targets.

The need to localize the new SDGs has been strongly expressed in the thematic and national consultations that made up the first stage of the post-2015 consultations as well as in the High Level Panel (HLP) and other reports.

The important role that local government plays in a new development agenda, as explained above, has been recognized in a number of key inputs to the Post-2015 process. The HLP report made this case clear in its report to the UN Secretary-General where it states, “the most pressing issue is not rural versus urban but how to foster a local, geographic approach to the post-2015 agenda.

The HLP believes this can be achieved by disaggregating data by place, and giving local authorities a bigger role in setting priorities, executing plans, monitoring results and engaging with local firms and communities.”³

Lessons learned from the pursuit of the MDGs identified the key role of local government in delivering on both local and national development objectives and strategies. This understanding and acknowledgement was further reinforced by the ‘Turin Communique on Localizing the Post-2015 Development Agenda’ when it unequivocally states in its ‘Preamble’ that:

“The implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda will greatly depend on local action and leadership, in coordination with other levels of governance. Any new development agenda will only have an impact on people’s lives if it is successfully implemented in the local level.”⁴

The Turin High level Global Dialogue from 14-15 October 2014 was the culmination of the ‘Localization of the Post-2015 Agenda’ global consultation process. The dialogue was hosted by the municipality of Turin and the national government of Italy. The event was part of the global consultation led by the representatives of the UNDP, UN Habitat and the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments for the Post-2015 Agenda toward Habitat III. It is to be noted also that CLGF was an active member of these dialogue processes including the Turin Dialogue.

The participants agreed that, in order to reduce poverty and inequalities and ensure an integrated territorial approach

³ UN High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013), A New Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through sustainable Development, New York, United Nations. Available on http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf

⁴ Turin communique on Localizing the Post-2015 Development Agenda (15 October, 2014)

to social, economic and environmental challenges, the Post-2015 Agenda will need strong local ownership and effective collaboration between different levels of government and local stakeholders.

3. Who would implement the initiative?

It is evident from the nature and tone of the current debate regarding the important role of local government and local communities that the new perspective should be part and parcel of the overall approach to delivering sustainable and equitable development which is a partnership between all levels of government – central, regional, and local-level government together with the other development partners and stakeholders.

The recognition of the important role of local government at the global level has resulted in the UN adoption of the process of ‘localizing the post-2015 development agenda’ as one of the six themes for consultations as part of the Second phase of the Dialogue. The concept is still evolving and searching for meaning, form and shape. What is recognized, however, is that ‘ultimately it will depend on the context and the specific characteristics of countries decentralisation programme.’⁵

Development partners and donors including regional and national governments together with local government and other development actors and partners at local level would all be involved in implementing the initiative!

4. Who are the main beneficiaries?

The main direct beneficiaries in terms of increased welfare and improved livelihood would be the communities and citizens of the Pacific region.

Other beneficiaries would be national governments and regional organizations as well as donor and development partners

5. Are regulatory or legislative changes required at the national level to implement this initiative?

The realisation of any regional or global development framework is dependent on regional and country context and characteristics. Each of the country would have to determine what regulatory or legislative changes, if any, may be necessary to facilitate the implementation of the initiative.

At the local level, however, because of the lack of capacity and powers including the conducive environment for business to grow and flourish etc., it is imperative that policy and regulatory changes are in order.

6. How would the initiative be funded?

Funding of the proposed initiative must be sought from development and donor partners.

Building the capacity of local government at the organisational and institutional level (also central government) is an ongoing challenge for CLGF.

7. Has this initiative been carried out previously?

This is the first time the initiative has been proposed.

8. What are the key risks in implementing this initiative?

In making this submission we are all too mindful of the new risks and challenges that local government is likely to face in getting additional responsibilities for realising regional and global goals and targets as is suggested here, and the new SDGs!

Already local government (not to mention central government) is grappling with the enormity of the task and current work load of delivering on local and national development goals and targets! Any suggestion of putting extra load to what it already has, needs to be made relative to what assistance and support local government would be getting from the international or regional development frameworks and agreements.

Translating regional and even global goals and targets to local targets, to say the least, would be challenging given the complexity of the goals in question and the political difficulty and reality of the process of inter-governmental

⁵ Paula Lucci (2015), ‘Localising the Post-2015 agenda – what does it mean in practice’; ODI Report, January, 2015

negotiations.

In terms of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 3 key challenges have been identified⁶:

- the workability of the development framework
- data availability; and
- choosing and setting targets at the local level

Delivering on local and national development goals and targets is directly linked to and dependent on 'capacity' in terms of human and financial resources at local level. At the present time capacity is the greatest risk and challenge facing local government.

If we are serious about delivering on our local, national and even regional and international development targets, then a commensurate level of resources (both human and financial) and powers should be devolved to local government, including setting the necessary legal framework.

9. Are there any complementary projects and programmes currently active?

At the present time, we are not aware of any complementary projects and programmes that are currently operational. The only related programme which has extensively discussed the developmental role of local government is the UN MDGs which will be phased out at the end of the year and replaced by the new global development framework, the Sustainable Development Goals.

It needs however, to be mentioned that CLGF in its efforts to promote the role of local government in development at the local level has signed a Memoranda of Understanding with UNDP a few years back, basically to underline the importance of partnership and collaboration.

10. What is the proposed timeframe for this initiative?

The proposed initiative has no timeframe as it is more of a new development approach as opposed to a project.

11. How would the initiative be sustained over the proposed timeframe?

The initiative is dependent on the support of all development partners and stakeholders playing their respective parts as required. In terms of funding, the initiative would be highly dependent on the support of donor and development partners.

5. Alignment to Regional Vision, Values and Objectives

Briefly describe how your initiative supports the vision, values and objectives set out in the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. These can be found in the Framework for Pacific Regionalism document or in the submissions guideline document.

Please limit your response to no more than 500 words

1. Briefly describe how your initiative supports this vision, values and objectives set out in the Framework for Pacific Regionalism.

Like all statements of intent, our Pacific Vision calls for 'a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity, so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy, and productive lives'.

The vision can only be realised if all citizens of the Pacific have access to opportunities to fulfil their needs and

⁶ Paula Lucci, 'Localising the Post-2015 agenda – What does it mean in practice; ODI Report, January, 2015.

aspirations and are free from the shackle of strife and poverty. And, that they are granted the freedom to determine what future they desire.

The realisation of the vision and objectives will be dependent in the inclusion and active participation of all citizens including the different levels of governance – formal and traditional – in the process of democratic governance and development to fulfil their dreams and aspirations as a people.

The unity of Pacific people in the determination and pursuit of their developmental goals brings to the equation the diversity and richness of Pacific cultural and religious beliefs and heritage which makes the Pacific unique and special relative to other cultures.

Inclusiveness and participatory governance and development which recognise and empower local government to bring about true democratic values, good governance within the precepts of the rule of law, and principles of human rights whilst at the same time subscribing to gender equality.

In short, peaceful societies and communities, their wellbeing, safety and security, will only be possible with open and honest relationships based on partnership, trust. And, the vision, values, and objectives of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism will be facilitated and fulfilled by giving recognition to the potential role of local government in democratic local governance and participatory and equitable development.

6. Additional Information

Please provide or attach additional information in support of this initiative.

Please limit your response to no more than 5 pages.

NONE