

Briefing and preliminary policy recommendations on the role of local government in the international COVID-19 crisis response

VNG International April 28, 2020



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1 Executive summary

The COVID-19 crisis is having a deep effect on local governance around the world. The outbreak has a profound effect on local public health, an unprecedented impact on local economies around the world and it magnifies existing social issues, including inequality. In some contexts, the crisis undermines local public order, where specifically developing and fragile countries may see the crisis disrupt local democratic processes.

Further, in the face of these external circumstances, local governments' financial and human resources are stretched to their limits and the lack of institutionalised crisis management practice takes its toll. In the countries where VNG International works, we see many examples where the quality of governance may undermine communities' resilience and stability, but also how local governments and their associations respond to the crisis.

Therefore we recommend that local governments strengthen their ability to respond to, learn from and mitigate the impact of crises, that external actors continue to support sustainable inclusive governance to strengthen the resilience of communities and that the international community sustains its support to international solidarity and local cooperation.

2 Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis is having a profound effect on local governance around the world. Also in developing countries, local governments are at the front line in addressing the effects of this unprecedented health and economic crisis. Some of the questions that come up are : 'How can we make sure that everyone has access to clean water hand-washing and sanitation to combat the virus?' 'How should communities manage their markets, to prevent further spreading of the current virus, while assuring local food supplies?' 'How are decisions taken at the local level if local councils cannot convene meetings?' 'Which part of the community is hit or most at risk by this crisis?'

This combined health and economic crisis has a profound effect on governance structures and local democracies. We have already seen that some of the key principles of good governance, such as transparency, accountability, control of corruption, efficiency, inclusiveness and the rule of law have come under increased pressure as a result of this acute crisis. We believe that governance systems able to apply these principles will prove to be the most resilient to the impact of this crisis, limiting damage and preparing for recovery. Therefore, this crisis is also a test of governance.

This paper combines observations on current challenges and opportunities for the municipal sector from our partners in the field (both local governments and their national associations) and from the local government networks in which VNG International is active.

Particular attention is paid to countries where the systems of local governance show signs of fragility, institutional underdevelopment or lack of resources, as these are our main areas of intervention. Staff and contacts in Burundi, DRC, Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tunisia and Ukraine¹ have shared their observations for this policy note.

This note ends with a number of recommendations for municipalities, external actors and the international community in order to support local governance deal with this crisis.

3

The impact of COVID-19 on local governments

Local governments are at the forefront of the current crisis, working together with their communities and health organizations to mitigate the current outbreak of COVID-19, while maintaining an orderly functioning of public services in their territories.

The crisis impacts local governments in five domains:

1. The outbreak has a profound effect on local public health.

Local governments are in many countries among the 'first responders' to monitor local public health, identify potential new cases and install measures to prevent the outbreak. Currently, many indicators point to local markets as the most likely source of the first human infection. Where local authorities are competent, independent and self-aware, they will be sound the alarm about certain conditions, which will improve the chances of outbreaks being caught at an early stage.

Even though healthcare is a national competency in most countries, local governments are directly confronted through increased pressure on local clinics and requests from citizens or organizations for extra medical and sanitary supplies.

¹ In these countries VNG International implements the following projects: Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan (IDEAL / DGIS); DRC (ARC Inawezekana/ DGIS); Myanmar (DEALS / DGIS), Tunisia (IDEMA / DGIS), Jordan (USAID Cities), Lebanon (EU MASAR), Ukraine (DGIS).

Moreover, local governments function as the eyes and ears on the ground for national authorities. Local governments have local knowledge: they know where the most vulnerable and most remote communities live and how to best inform them about new (national) crisis measures.

Despite this important signalling function and the direct demands from citizens and local clinics, resources for local public health are extremely limited, especially in less developed countries.

2. The measures taken are having an unprecedented impact on local economies around the world

The economic recession following the crisis will be of monumental size. Developing countries already state that the impact on the local economy will most probably lead to more deaths than the actual virus. Many developing countries have a gigantic informal economy, which comes to a halt with social distancing measures. Inequalities, between poor and rich and men and women, will deepen. Unemployment rates are likely to explode, and will widen the income gap, to the detriment of women and youth.

As social distancing practices are implemented, transportation links with the world are largely severed, tourism and trade will come to a standstill. Some countries have chosen to limit or completely ban traffic between the commercial capitals and the hinterlands. Moreover, communities which heavily rely on cross-border trade have seen borders close and an equal drop in commerce.

3. The COVID-19 outbreak magnifies existing social issues

Worldwide, the COVID-19 crisis has a large impact on youth, women and elderly. Given that young people cannot go to school for a longer period of time and that home schooling is often limited, educational disadvantage is arising, especially in problematic families. In many countries, extra earnings of young people are also lost. Boredom and difficult home situations make young people restless and unrest is kicked out on the street. Furthermore, there is increasing evidence of an increase of domestic violence against women and children, based on an increase of calls to helplines and demands for emergency shelters. Another societal problem is the loneliness that results from the far-reaching social distancing measures. All of these issues have a large and lasting impact on local communities. It is likely that the spread of fear, panic and psychological distress will continue among communities.

Economic crises have a tendency to exacerbate economic inequalities. Localities or social classes that do not have the financial reserves to cope will lose out. As these reserves at individual households are usually very limited or non-existent, they feel the impact immediately. The most vulnerable communities, including those hosting migrants, are impacted most severely. Many refugees rely on the informal economy for their main source of income and do daily work. This is the first type of labour that is no longer needed. It is safe to state that citizens with economic issues due to the crisis will first turn to their local governments for financial help.

4. The crisis may undermine local public order

The stagnation of local economic growth and large sections of the population which are immediately impacted by the social distancing measures and economic downturn, may result in a declining trust in democratic local government and increased civil unrest.

This trust in the social contract can be diminished directly through public protests against the social distancing measures, or indirectly through reduced quality of public services, such as spatial planning, clean water, housing, electricity, waste management, as financial resources dry up.

5. Developing and fragile countries may see the crisis disrupt local democratic processes

A heavily centralized crisis response, without proper consultation local governments, creates an immediate risk for local democracy. This is an even more pronounced risk in countries where elections are planned in 2020. Even if elections continue, people might not feel secure to go out and vote. Current local leadership might be the victim of the crisis, whereas at the same time, opposition parties will have less opportunities for campaigning.

There are principal risks to governance in (post-)conflict countries where the crisis can be abused by dishonest political actors by disrupting democratic processes for political gain. In fragile countries such as South Sudan, Burundi and the DRC, the tightening of the aid sector and the heightened impact of new humanitarian catastrophes may undermine the developmental progress which has been made over the past years. At the national level, important amendments to national legislation or new reforms are delayed which might mean that important processes come to a halt, including decentralisation reforms.

4 General challenges for local governments

Financial resources

Public health, local economy, social issues, local public order or governance: local governments are best placed to adapt national policies to local circumstances. For example, when it comes to local markets, local government leaders are in touch with the different community leaders, which may not be represented at the national level. National governments therefore decentralise competences to subnational levels, however often without the concomitant financial resources. This creates financial issues for local governments. In crises situations this is aggravated by less available resources, due to the economic recession, whereas costs at local level are increasing, notably in the health sector.

In the most remote areas in fragile states, like Burundi, South Sudan and the DRC, humanitarian and development assistance is often the only source of income and support. Local communities which rely on this support are disproportionately hit by the crisis as aid operations are reduced and support is redirected to the COVID-19 response in the developed countries. Any developmental progress is under threat and risks destabilizing communities.

Human resources

Local governments in developing countries are generally understaffed. Also, the operating staff often lack capacities, due to limited personal development and training options. The crisis will worsen the situation, as employees might drop out due to illness or having to take care of family.

Also, it might become more difficult to access the workplace and schools, because of the fall-out of (public) transport options. At some point, local governments might not be able to pay salaries to their staff, leading to further drop-out and decrease of motivation of those who stay. Moreover, expat staff of many organizations cooperating with local governments have been recalled home as the risks of staying have gone up and opportunities to leave are reducing.

Lack of institutionalised crisis management practice

In many countries, there is lack of experience in dealing with epidemic-related crisis situations and little support and guidance from central government towards the local governments. Protocols, financial support schemes and all types of equipment and materials are missing.

5

Overview: ongoing actions by local governments

Despite the difficult situation of the COVID-19 crisis, local governments and their communities have moved into the action mode straight away, often with relevant stakeholders on their territory or region. Table 1 shows the actions as well as the challenges and is based on the input from local governments in Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan, DRC, Myanmar, Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon, Ukraine. Please note that it lists all actions; local governments in some countries have only been able to carry out some and are lagging behind on others. The overview is categorized around the five domains mentioned in the previous paragraph. The list is not exhaustive and shows the diversity and the complexity of some of the responsibilities of local governments.

Table 1: Actions taken in the field & related challenges

Local public health	
Actions taken in the field	Related challenges in the field
Monitoring of local public health and identification/testing potential new cases (feeding back to national crisis team)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fragile public health systems and WASH structures, with limited administration and resources, leading to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shortages in vehicles and equipment used in spraying and sanitization operations, such as tankers, spraying equipment, etc.
Distributing of gloves and hand sanitizers, to vulnerable groups, civil servants and other people in vital jobs	
Organizing for (extra) medical/sanitary equipment, hospital beds, day care facilities etc. (equipment & infrastructure)	

Informing the public, crisis communication, awareness raising, public mobilisation (radio, social media, tv, newspapers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shortages in masks, protective clothing, and health and safety items ○ Shortages in sanitization products throughout all municipalities continued, with some municipalities running out completely • Increased costs of the continuous and ongoing sanitization efforts are becoming a heavy financial burden on the municipalities, in light of, limited donations and aid from local business owners and enterprises • Social distancing is very difficult/impossible in many developing countries • Nomadic populations do not belong to any locality • Illiteracy of the general public, fake news, political agenda of government actors • Municipality does not have capacity to produce information videos and other materials etc.
Ensuring that local media have access to full and truthful information about plans and activities: support effort for public communication	
Install measures to prevent the outbreak (incl. soap and water in all public buildings, clear stripes on the floors to facilitate social distancing etc.)	
Cleaning of public buildings and infrastructure	
Identification of most vulnerable groups and making sure measures and information reaches them too.	
Local economy	
Actions taken in the field	Related challenges in the field
Redirecting funds local budgets to support health system and provide first response to those affected by COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping markets open or not? (agglomeration of people vs. important place for food supply and source of income)
Identifying which entrepreneurs and local businesses are at highest risk and redirecting them to national financial support, if any	
Provision of support to vital economic infrastructure (markets, public transport)	
Ensuring continuation of food production	
Leniency measures towards companies and citizens, with regard to paying rent or taxes to the local government	
Local public order	
Actions taken in the field	Related challenges in the field

<p>Enforcing of national regulations and directives (incl. lock-down measures & no major gatherings), while raising awareness of the reasoning behind these regulations</p> <p>Assist security and the armed forces during the curfew, by closing off roads connecting to main streets preventing too many vehicles from entering markets and reducing the possibility of crowds forming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited law capacity for chief/administrators to keep order at the grass root level Weak enforcement agencies, leading to misinterpretation of directives Limited structures to contain the situation Violence against civil servants/police & violence by police Limited capacity and risk of infringement on human rights (privacy, right to assemble, right to information etc.) In efforts to track & trace potential cases of COVID-19, and limit the outbreak, temporary measures which restrict individual freedoms, may become a fixture of public governance Most countries have closed their international borders and limited or completely stopped international air travel. Also many countries, including Sudan and Niger have limited travel to the capital cities and other domestic travel. In some cases this is leading to more fraud and corruption practices at borders The spread of (incorrect) rumours about the Coronavirus, despite the continuous publication of awareness posts by municipalities and other spheres of government.
<p>Issuing fines if people/organizations disobey the national regulations</p>	
<p>Checking if local businesses and other organizations keep to national measures</p>	
<p>Enforcing and dealing with travel restrictions</p>	
<p>Dealing with civil unrest/demonstrations</p>	
<p>Setting up of places for quarantine (for ill people)</p>	
Social issues	
Actions taken in the field	Related challenges in the field
<p>Setting up of helplines/WhatsApp services for domestic violence and expanding shelter homes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to trace some of the social issues Slow and weak internet and network connections Discrimination of sick people
<p>Setting up of helplines/WhatsApp services for elderly</p>	
<p>Providing food, medicines and other (financial) support for the weakest, including refugees</p> <p>Although the support to weak households in Rwanda is a national policy, it relies a lot on local knowledge. Local governments are tasked with identifying the households which are most in need.</p>	

<p>Stimulating voluntary community initiatives which help the crisis response</p>	
<p>Setting up of community support programmes</p>	
Governance	
Actions taken in the field	Related challenges in the field
<p>Ensuring the continuation of essential public services (drinking water, waste management etc.), if possible at distance/online</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public distrust in (local) government • Diminishing local tax revenue • Local governments will need to readjust their budgets in order to reflect the increased local needs and a reduction in local tax revenues
<p>Coordination with the national level based on local circumstances and needs</p> <p>Local Government Associations ensure effective linkages between the local structures and the national structures, based on local needs assessments established by their members (local governments)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In developing countries, local governments do not have access to capital markets to borrow money and are therefore reliant on the central government and international donor community. This also increases their dependency to maintain these basic services such as ensuring clean drinking water, sanitation, waste management
<p>Coordination of emergency support services/NGOs at a local level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing for the coordination structures that organisations need to plan and deliver assistance. • Engaging with humanitarian actors as they analyse the needs and plan their responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some local governments have chosen to only provide the essential services – other services are put on hold; this might cause issues in the long-run • Risks of centralized response to the crisis, without real consultation and involvement of other levels • Whereas the decentralization agenda has made big strides over the past years, this crisis risks triggering national governments to repatriate some of the powers to the central level. It will be crucial to maintain the principle of subsidiarity in crisis response • Important amendments to the (non-COVID-19) national legislation are being delayed which brings a risk of bringing decentralisation reform to halt • Local government does not have access to all ethnic or tribal communities • Humanitarian actors do not always seek coordination with local governments

6 Recommendations

1. Local governments to strengthen their ability to respond, learn and mitigate the impact in a crisis

1.a. Disaster response

In times of crises, local governments can take a coordinating role, connecting with their communities through clear communication and implementing adequate mitigation measures. By implementing policies in line with national guidelines, but in cooperation with representatives of the community, they can assure the effectiveness of e.g. social distancing guidelines and adherence thereto. Local governments can identify vulnerable households or communities for emergency assistance.

The coordination with humanitarian actors and information-sharing with the national level can therefore be facilitated at the local level. Guidelines exist for the collaboration between humanitarian actors and local governments, to overcome existing hurdles². This can promote the inclusiveness of decision-making, support the eventual implementation of measures taken and help national governments identify local resources. These guidelines and protocols can be operationalized through the set-up and use of local emergency coordination mechanisms, supporting the local government as local hub for other spheres of government and stakeholders. Having clear pre-defined communication and coordination structures may limit and prevent tension between different crisis responders. Also it will prevent the set-up of parallel structures outside the reach of local accountability.

1.b. Medium-term crisis response

The current COVID-19 crisis will be an effort of many months, if not longer. This means that sharing the burden of the crisis will be inevitable. In many crises where intergenerational solidarity and solidarity between different demographics of the community have been an issue, strong local leadership can help to mobilize this solidarity. Coming together around common ethical values may help dampen the impact of the crisis.

Also, as a crisis lasts longer, it will be important to harmonize approaches to assure that tensions between different local approaches do not undermine each other. Therefore a strengthening of local government associations will support an improved coordination and function as a support to national relief efforts.

National and regional associations of local governments (LGAs) are playing an important role as linking pin towards central governments and other stakeholders.

² UCLG, VNG International & CUF's Guidelines for collaboration between humanitarian actors and local governments - https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/guideautoriteslocales3langues_1.pdf

While the thematic focus of LGAs has shifted to COVID-19, responsibilities to their membership remain the same:

- Liaising and lobbying on behalf of members with other spheres of governments;
- Service delivery towards members;
- The provision of learning and exchange possibilities.

In countries where local governments structurally lack resources and capacities to respond to crises and forthcoming needs, LGAs step into the gaps by, for example, providing information materials to members, for citizens, and by monitoring which health care supplies are needed.

1.c. Recovery planning response

While local governments are currently still in the midst of the first emergency response, many want to already move towards thinking about the long-term. How can local governments assure the continuity of their service delivery beyond the crisis? Can we learn from this crisis and build back better in a way that will display this resilience, while safeguarding local democracy and all principles of good and inclusive public governance? The ability of communities to bounce back, both economically and socially, is function of the quality of governance.

It is important that governments resist the urge to promise that things will be rebuilt in the short run. This is a key lesson learnt which frequently returns during the recovery phase in the aftermath of natural disaster programmes. Local governments can make sure that investments done in the midst of a crisis are connected with longer term development plans. Existing local development plans will most probably need a review, as the (local) context has significantly changed. Local governments have an vital role in spatial planning, clean water, housing, electricity and waste management, all issues which if properly implemented, would result in improved community resilience.

Local tax revenues also dwindles as the local economy gets hit. This will create financial difficulties for local governments very soon. A transparent reallocation of resources is desirable and participatory budgeting as it is being piloted in projects, could be a more widely implemented approach as a result of this crisis.

1.d. Prevention and risk mitigation

Based on thorough research and consultations with many governance experts, the Sendai framework for Disaster Risk Management highlights four priorities for improved disaster risk governance:

- i. addressing disaster risk in publicly owned, managed or regulated services and infrastructures;
- ii. promoting and providing incentives, for actions by persons, households, communities and businesses;
- iii. enhancing relevant mechanisms and initiatives for disaster risk transparency, which may include financial incentives, public awareness-raising and training initiatives, reporting requirements and legal and administrative measures; and

- iv. putting in place coordination and organizational structures.

Through evaluation and learning, local governments can be better prepared for next crises. In fact, national and local governments are already looking into lessons learned from the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi with Ebola. Structures will be more responsive in a next crisis, if they are well set-up and capacitated now. Crises are seldomly the first of their kind and to be able to tap into lessons learned by other local governments in similar situations proves to be of high value. Future crisis response will be strengthened if peer learning on the review or development of protocols and divisions of roles between national local governments, humanitarian agencies and other stakeholders is facilitated.

2. Assure inclusive governance at all levels throughout the crisis

In crisis management, the different levels of government vie for control and responsibility. There exist various pressures to either centralize the response for the sake of efficiency, or localize the response in order to tailor the response to individuals and communities. From both perspectives, attention should be given to the importance of inclusiveness for the response to be sustainable. The ability of local governments to enquire, inform, convince and bring along individuals and specific interests with the choices of the community are indispensable.

This is particularly true for marginalised groups, who are at risk of being hit hardest. Bringing them into the mainstream will have various benefits. Having access to these groups strengthens public health; supporting their income makes local economies more resilient by supporting demand for local products and an improved trust and social contract between the government and citizen supports sustainable, equitable and more inclusive social-economic recovery.

Local governments usually have crucial information about the community needs. It is crucial to unlock this knowledge and support these localities with ways to raise and reallocate resources to alleviate the suffering and provide opportunities for the most disenfranchised. Using the data available and longer term development objectives such as spatial development plans, methods like scenario planning can be of use to local governments to inform response and recovery.

The quality of governance and the quality of the democracy will strengthen the social contract between citizens and government. It is crucial that on the one hand all citizens feel included and have influence on how they are governed and on the other hand that local governments provide essential services. Each country, based on their individual histories and context will need to support this decentralised environment, favourable to strengthening this social contract. In the longer run, strengthening institutions, building the capacity to mobilise finance will be crucial in local revenue mobilisation³ and may in fact lead to a more durable recovery.

³ VNG International publication, Local Revenue Mobilisation in Myanmar https://www.vng-international.nl/sites/default/files/Local%20Revenue%20Mobilisation%20in%20Myanmar%20-%20VNG%20International_042020_2.pdf

Box 1 : Role of VNG in the Netherlands' COVID-19 crisis response

VNG has a seat in the national operational outbreak team, negotiates with the central government on extra financial resources, is creating a template for a 'social distancing plan for municipalities' and welcomed 2500 members to its new COVID-19 forum, where members can ask questions about all the new challenges they encounter. For the national government, VNG has proved very helpful for collecting the most relevant information from the municipalities on vulnerable families and the municipalities' ability to continue to finance certain types of care. Mayors in the Netherlands have access to peer learning on crisis management as facilitated by the Dutch Association of Mayors.

Looking forward, the VNG has identified three types of recovery plans that Dutch municipalities will develop:

- Acute emergency plans (short-term)
- Financial impact and societal impact plans (medium-term)
- Resilience assessments (learning from the crisis) (long-term)

Questions for the future

Local governments around the world will need to take careful decisions in the coming period. New problems will arise in the aftermath of the health crisis, which require new solutions. All of this is leading to new questions.

The VNG has formulated questions that are relevant to the debate of the coming period.

1. Which activities which arose during the crisis should be continued after the crisis? (e.g. good communication and coordination between national and local governments)
2. Which new competences and tasks of local governments will remain and who decides on this? (need for democratic oversight)
3. How do we continue to build trust and strong(er) local democracy, as local governments?
4. How do we organize a society which takes social distancing into account?
5. Rediscovered (international) solidarity: how do we maintain this?
6. How do we build onto the current digitalization leap?
7. How do we prevent negative effects of the crisis approach from happening?
8. Which uncomfortable questions deserve attention?

In VNG International's view, these questions are not only relevant for the Netherlands, but also for municipalities and associations of municipalities in other countries. We stand ready to help answer them in the near future, together with local governments in partner countries.

3. Sustain international solidarity & local cooperation

3.a. Municipalities' access to international support

Throughout the years, municipalities have supported each other through twinning and other international initiatives. Recently, we have seen a tendency that municipalities in the global north, would participate on a project basis, fellow municipalities in the south. Through bundling their support with other aid initiatives, and through working together with professional organizations capacitating local governments, the impact of these projects are more significant and sustainable. The COVID-19 crisis necessitates office workers to reinvent their usual way of doing business and we see many new initiatives to bring local governments together through online platforms.

Training of local government officials is being reformed and formatted into online modules, so as to make them accessible when flying is not possible. For areas where internet connections are weak, trainings are designed, so that the lectures can be sent in audio-file only or in low resolution video. This crisis may reinvigorate new ways in which local governments work together.

3.b. International networks

Associations of local governments play an important role in connecting local governments⁴. As local governments across the world are experiencing different waves of this crisis, LGAs are using existing international infrastructures to help provide local governments that still face the highest peak with resources and information from areas that have endured such a peak already. International fora are being used to share the experience of countries that are flattening the curve with those who are still working to curb the rise in cases. LGAs are facilitating dialogue between mayors. This is especially useful in the case where there is a lack of adequate response and poor coordination with central governments.

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG⁵) is the global umbrella of local and regional governments. Within this organization various mechanisms exist to facilitate the peer learning and support between municipalities. The Capacity and Institution Building (CIB) Working Group, is one network that is helping facilitate this learning⁶. The CIB Working Group is gathering existing tools and templates for local government crisis management, response and recovery for learning purposes and to avoid duplication of efforts. The UCLG Taskforce for Territorial Prevention and Management of Crisis has been tasked with the implementation of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR). The Global Alliance for Urban Crises (GAUC), working on more effective collaboration between humanitarians and local authorities. Examples are the hosting of an event about the citification of refugee camps during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.

⁴ It is in many countries through the local LGAs that VNG International supports municipalities. For example, it partners up with the associations in Burundi (ABELO), Mali (AMM), Rwanda (RALGA), Somaliland (ALGSL). Also VNG International works together with 'northern' associations such as in Belgium (VVSG), Canada (FCM), France (CUF), Sweden (SKR).

⁵ www.uclg.org

⁶ www.cib-uclg.org

This has since fed into the 2018 revision of the SPHERE humanitarian handbook for humanitarian standards urban- and local-governance proof, and supporting the development of a framework for engagement between local authorities and humanitarian actors together with the GAUC.

3.c. International donors

International donor organisations have issued different statements about the COVID-19 crisis in partner countries and are still defining their responses. Many are looking into opportunities to reallocate funds within ongoing, international programmes, to better tackle the COVID-19 crisis and be as relevant as possible in the new context. This is good, but might lead to a highly fragmented response, whereas what is needed is a strong and coordinated response with sufficient flexible funding that support local governments that are working on the frontlines of the response in partner countries. In fact, international cooperation will be critical for subnational governments. Now, more than ever, local governments are in need of capacity building, support in formulating proper policies, reviewing and strengthening municipal services etc.. Public health is a public good and the fight against the pandemic emphasises even more the need for a strong public sector.

7 Relevant resources

- [Briefing on work of Association of Netherlands Municipalities during the COVID-19 crisis \(March 2020\)](#) (also available in [FR](#))
- [Notes from UCLG Live Learning Event – responses of cities to COVID-19 – 25 March](#)
- [Notes of Live Learning Event for Local Government Associations on COVID-19 April](#)
- [News item The Hague Academy for Local Governance ‘Learning from local responses to an infectious disease in Monrovia’](#)
- [Google Drive of Capacity and Institution Building Working Group – COVID-19 approaches](#)
- Protocol of Engagement between Local Governments and Humanitarian Actors - Global Alliance for Urban Crises - <http://urbancrises.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/5.-GUIDANCE-NOTE-Protocol-of-Engagement-Dokument-JD-060219.pdf>

For further questions on this briefing you can contact:

Jessie Post, Policy Advisor, jessie.post@vng.nl

Volkert Doop, Project Manager, volkert.doop@vng.nl

VNG International

P.O.Box 30435

2500 GK The Hague

Tel +31 70 373 8401

Tel +31 70 373 8660

vng-international@vng.nl

www.vng-international.nl

vng-international.nl