



Analysis of local decentralised co-operation

The search for synergy. The role of national local government associations in municipal international policy: trends in Europe and the description of a case

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Observing the growing involvement of their membership in international affairs, many national associations of municipalities, as well as their members with their international efforts in the past years. However, it is observed that municipal international policy and cooperation is not yet a key task for most national associations of municipalities. Nevertheless their international role in development assistance and city-to-city cooperation is growing. Despite the great variety of specific international approaches by local government associations, it is argued that national associations of local governments can and should play a crucial role in the emerging aid-effectiveness agenda and the worldwide decentralisation efforts. National local government associations are well-positioned, to develop and guide a nation wide approach on municipal international cooperation if they have the political will and if they succeed to create synergy between the city-to-city cooperation, from different countries and the development programmes of the national government and international donors. Also in development cooperation a multi-level governance approach is needed if we want to improve the functioning of the public sector.

Keywords

local government associations |
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1. Presentation

It is no news at all to state that in most countries local governments are increasingly involved in international cooperation and develop their own international policy. Taking into account that thousands and thousands of local governments are active in the international arena, it is not a surprise that the motives, the objectives, the ambitions, the models, the instruments, the capacity, the finances, the activities of this involvement differ enormously. Observing this growing involvement of their membership in international affairs, many national associations of municipalities, as well as their international associations, have developed policies and services to support the members with their international orientation and efforts in the past years. Sometimes such policies and services were developed on the strong request for strategic and technical support by a group of local governments amongst their membership and sometimes this was developed on the initiative of the association itself.

In this article I will focus on this role of national local government associations in the emerging field of municipal international policy. The first section will deal with a few aspects of the history of the involvement of local government associations which are still relevant if one tries to understand the position and the potential of local government associations in this international work. In the second section of this article a description of the state of affairs of the work of local government associations in the area of municipal international policy will be given. Attention is given to the different roles, the different services and the volume of the work of local government associations in this field. In the third section

the importance of the role of local government associations in the international orientation of municipalities in general and in development cooperation in particular will be assessed. Special attention will be given to the international cooperation between national associations in order to develop their capacities and become stronger players on behalf of their membership in the processes of decentralisation. Finally in a last section the role of national local government associations in municipal international policies will be discussed.

I would like to underline that I am not a scientist or a researcher. I am a practitioner. Since the beginning of 1989 I work in the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) to develop its role in this area of municipal international policy. This article is based on my experiences and observations as employee of VNG and later on as director of VNG International, the International Cooperation Agency of the VNG. Unmistakably this leads to a practical and a Western European bias. The situation in Latin America remains underexposed in this article: there is work for a practitioner from Latin America. Having said this, I will nevertheless refer to relevant literature where available and to a recent small research project I did together with Renske Steenbergen, staff member of UCLG. By writing down my experiences with the growth of VNG's services for its members in the field of international policies, I hope to give information and insights that will turn out to be useful resource material for further research. And more research is very important, because I do believe that municipal international policies and cooperation, and the role of local government associations in this field will only get further recognition and will only advance in quality if it gets



growing and sufficient attention from the academic world.

The careful reader has observed that I use the term 'municipal international policy' instead of 'decentralised cooperation'. This is not only caused by my Nordic background where the term 'municipal international cooperation' or 'city-to-city cooperation' (c2c) is more common than 'decentralised cooperation'. No, it is more related to two observations which make the term 'decentralised cooperation' too limited to describe the international work of national associations of municipalities. And also slightly ambiguous.

First of all, 'municipal international policy' refers to the overall orientation of local governments on their position in the world, including image or identity branding; international economic cooperation and competition; following and implementing international policy agendas; collecting and sharing relevant international know-how and best practice through twinning, networks or other forms of contact; adoption of sustainable purchase and banking policies; development aid and cooperation; peace and human rights promotion as well as local awareness raising activities. 'Decentralised cooperation' like 'municipal international cooperation' refers more to one of the -and let me be clear: one of the most important- instruments of municipal international policies: cooperation with other local governments in the world in order to achieve specific goals. Whereas 'municipal international cooperation' is used for all cooperation activities of local governments, 'decentralised cooperation' seems to be used more specifically to refer to the role of local governments in development cooperation. The European Commission (COM 2008) uses decentralised cooperation "to

describe the publicly and privately funded aid provided by and through local authorities, networks and other local actors". Having said that it should be mentioned that several authors in recent articles use the term decentralised cooperation to describe the transformation of the traditional focus on aid projects between twinned local governments into "an instrument for mutual 'empowerment' which takes decentralisation and local autonomy as universal principles" (Garcé 2008). And Bossuyt defines modern decentralised cooperation as cooperation between sub-national levels of government in which the need to construct more egalitarian, long-term partnerships is emphasized with a view to tackling common agendas through structured, reciprocal exchanges (Bossuyt 2008). However, even with this broader and interesting definition decentralised cooperation remains just one of the instruments of municipal international policy. Municipal international policy goes beyond the field of decentralized cooperation and reflects the ambition of local government to be a reliable partner in the new international political space composed of multiple actors and to "occupy a strategic position at a time when they are being recognised by international organizations and by the European Union, as major actors on the international scene" (IDHIL 2008).

Secondly, the term 'decentralised cooperation' might suggest that the international cooperation between local governments is a decentralised task from central government to local government. And that is -unfortunately- still very far from reality in most countries. International cooperation between local governments originates from their authority to deal with their own household. International cooperation has been identified by many local governments as a necessary instrument to enhance the

quality of life in their communities. Or as an instrument with which they can contribute to international solidarity on behalf of their citizens. Increasingly local governments showed that they can contribute to local development elsewhere through their specific approaches and position. Increasingly local governments succeeded to get recognition for their work and convinced central governments and international donor agencies to co-finance such activities. However in many countries, probably to a certain extent apart from France and Spain, a well-formulated central government policy on how to work with local and regional governments to achieve international objectives does not exist. Based on such a well-considered view on the potentials of decentralised cooperation, we can imagine that central governments would decentralise certain tasks in the international arena to local and regional governments. Though we are still rather far away from this situation, this could create real partnership and a well-concerted multi-level government approach in which different tiers of government would really join hands to achieve the international development goals. The -still rather minor- position of local government in the new EU Non State Actor Programme and the Communication from the Commission about local authorities as actors for development (COM 2008) are promising examples of growing recognition and partnership.

Having said all this, it is not my intention to start a long debate about terminology. On the contrary I will deal in all sections of this article especially with the role of national associations of local governments in the field of municipal international cooperation or -for those who prefer to use this terminology- decentralised international cooperation because this is on the one hand probably the most important instrument for

local governments to give shape to their international policies. And on the other hand, as I will argue later on, this is where national local government associations can contribute significantly to a more coordinated approach for the structured involvement of local governments in development cooperation efforts thus creating synergy between different levels of government in their efforts to promote decentralisation and to reduce poverty.

2. History of the role of national associations of municipalities

Reflections on municipal international cooperation often start with the impressive movement of municipal twinning relations or 'jumelages' in Europe after the Second World War. However, the history of municipal international orientation and cooperation is much older, but unfortunately still insufficiently described. Without doubt one of the most important milestones is the founding of the *Union Internationale des Villes* (in 1928 renamed as International Union of Local Authorities - IULA) in 1913 during a congress in Ghent which was convened at the instance of the Belgian Union of Towns. This first attempt of cities to work formally together in the international arena should be seen, as Gaspari (2002) points out, against the birth of a European international municipal movement at the beginning of the 20th century. Informal networks of European socialist councillors and well-known internationalists played a decisive role in the establishment of the International Union, which took place 6 years before the establishment of the League of Nations. More than 160 local governments, 50 specialised associations of local governments and 21 representatives of national governments participated.



Despite ambitious plans, World War I caused a 10 year interruption in the work of the International Union. The Union's secretary-general, the Belgian senator Emile Vinck, temporarily relocated to the office of the Netherlands Association of Municipalities (VNG) in neutral The Hague. After the war, the Union was refused a voice at the League of Nations. Fascist states, and others too, denied municipalities the right to participate outside national territory (Herbert, 2007). Nevertheless the organisation continued. Started as a voluntary association of individual cities, after World War I it soon became an international association of which the members were predominantly national associations of municipalities. The next international congress of the Union convened in Amsterdam in 1924 where the two main pillars of the organisation became visible: on the one hand the exchange of practical municipal expertise and information sharing about administrative systems in different countries between national associations of local governments and on the other hand the objective to contribute to peaceful international cooperation. Renamed as IULA the organisation soon expanded to the Americas and more marginally to Africa and Asia by the 1930s.

The development of IULA in the beginning of the 20th century has been a token of early awareness that national associations should play a role internationally on behalf of their membership. Although hardly documented, we know that many individual local governments in Europe warned against the rearmament after the First World War and initiated activities against the growing militarism. Many councils of local governments in Europe showed their concern about the rise to power of Hitler in Germany in 1933. A famous example is the decision by the Dutch city of Zaandam to boycott the purchase of German products. This decision was annulled

by the Dutch government because it was seen as appalling for a nation with which The Netherlands had friendly relations. Unfortunately it is not known how national associations of municipalities reacted to these actions of municipal international policy. It would certainly be an interesting field of further historic research.

After World War II, when free movement and free exchange of views were possible again, the idea of 'never again' was the core testimony. The only way forward for Europe was mutual cooperation. The well known 'jumelage' was the contribution of local governments to the reconstruction of Europe. In 1951 about 50 mayors took the initiative to create the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), because they believed that the municipality was the best place to regain trust and understanding between the people of Europe. The Frenchman Jean Barthe, one of the founders of CEMR, defined 'jumelage' as an officially-sanctioned permanent partnership between two or more municipalities which promotes the exchange of knowledge and experience, and involves all layers of the population. The establishment of CEMR with national branches reveals the fact that many national associations of local governments didn't react very actively to the new twinning movement in Europe. Many national associations of local governments were occupied with national issues and limited their involvement to collect and publish information about the 'jumelages' and to mediate in case of requests for contact. The national branches of CEMR however started to stimulate and coordinate the 'jumelage' movement. According to Clarke (2008) we should not use the word 'movement' because it suggests more coherence than can be found in the history of town twinning; he argues that it is better to see town twinning just as a 'device for producing proximity'.

After World War II, IULA focussed in a rather neutral-political way on information exchange, representation and lobbying, membership servicing and on the promotion of decentralisation. In a reaction representatives of more leftist oriented local governments took the initiative to establish the United Towns Organisation (UTO) in Aix-les-Bains in 1957. Its objective was to promote international cooperation among cities and towns. UTO developed as a major protagonist of twinning and linking of all kinds with the aim to further the cause of human rights and permanently encouraging peace and justice.

In the sixties, fuelled by the proclamation of the Second UN Development Decade 1970-1980 in 1969, many local governments in Europe developed activities to support projects in the so-called Third World. Initially local governments focussed on awareness raising and on giving financial support to projects initiated by local citizens initiatives. Later on in the seventies and eighties many local governments developed partnerships with local governments in developing countries. Often on the request of active citizens groups many local governments embarked on more critical international policies as well. Municipalities declared themselves nuclear free, initiated activities to overcome the East-West divide, protested against the apartheid system in South Africa and showed solidarity with the people of Nicaragua. Due to the fact that just a minority of their membership developed active international policies, most national associations of municipalities took a rather detached position towards this phenomenon. The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) for instance just decided to make staff capacity available to support members with their international policy after strong appeals from groups of members in the late 1980s. How-

ever, when decisions by Dutch municipalities to give financial support to projects in developing countries were confronted with annulment by national government in the early seventies, the VNG vigorously defended the position of its members.

From the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties onwards many national associations of local governments in Europe, as well as in other parts of the world, started to develop services to support their members in formulating and implementing municipal international policies. Often as the result of political discussions about the question whether this is really an important task for an association or not. It is illustrative to briefly describe the decision making within the VNG in the eighties and early nineties. After two congresses with a good turn out of Dutch municipalities involved in development cooperation, the VNG decided - after an offer by the National Council for Development Cooperation (financed by the Dutch government) to subsidize this - to assign one staff member to develop services in support of this type of work in 1987. In the same year more than 100 Dutch municipalities gathered to discuss their policies to promote peace, to resist nuclear weapons and to overcome the East-West divide. It lasted two years, with internal political debates, before the VNG accepted the idea to house a staff member to support this platform of 'cities active for peace' on the condition that the municipalities in favour of this would pay an annual additional fee to the VNG. In 1990 the first VNG handbook on municipal international policy is published: "A World of Municipalities". The handbook addressed the legal aspects of municipal international policy and cooperation, the municipal attention for jumelages and thematic knowledge networks in Europe, development cooperation, pea-



ce and security, anti-apartheid, sustainable development and environment and finally argued for the need to develop an integrated international or global policy as municipal. In the same year the staff backed by the political board of VNG succeeded to successfully discuss central government funding for municipal cooperation with partners in developing countries with the well-known Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, Jan Pronk. Two years later, confronted with a boom of twinning contacts with countries in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall and an increasing number of requests from young associations of local governments for assistance in both developing countries as well as in the young democracies in Eastern Europe, the VNG decided to make staff capacity available for this work out of its general income from membership fees.

The growth of attention for the international orientation of local governments in the different national associations caused a change in the attention of IULA as well. In 1995 IULA devoted for the first time its 32nd World Congress on municipal international cooperation. The research done by this network of national associations has been crucial and resulted in the publication "Local challenges to global change. A global perspective on municipal international cooperation" (Schip, 1995). It should be underlined that UTO as well as the network of "Towns and Development" embarked much earlier on active support for decentralised cooperation and municipal international cooperation. From the mid-nineties onwards staff of national local government associations involved in municipal international cooperation gathered regularly within IULA in order to exchange experience and professionalize their work. From Latin America the national associations of Ecua-

dor and Colombia as well as the regional section of IULA (nowadays: FLAGMA-UCLG) took part. Other active participants were the local government associations of UK, Canada, Finland, Sweden, Spain, Finland and The Netherlands.

Nowadays attention and support for municipal international policy and decentralised cooperation are at the heart of the work of the world organisation of local governments United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). UCLG is the result of a merger between UTO and IULA in 2004. Getting further recognition for the role of local governments in development cooperation is one of the main points of attention of UCLG. Political committees on decentralised cooperation, on the millennium development goals and on city diplomacy, the role of local governments on peace building, human rights and post-conflict reconstruction are in place. A technical working group on capacity and institutions building (CIB) of practitioners of various national associations is active to professionalize the work in the field of municipal international cooperation and has produced a paper on 'aid effectiveness and local governments' (Smith, 2008). UCLG, together with the World Bank, UN Habitat, EU, UNEP, ADB and 18 national donor countries, participates on behalf of the membership in the Cities Alliance, a global coalition of cities and their development partners committed to scaling up successful approaches to poverty reduction. The European section of UCLG, CEMR, has received subsidy from the EU -out of the new EU Non-State-Actor and Local Authorities in Development Programme- in order to create a European wide platform to coordinate and to improve the quality of the development work of the national associations of local governments. This all reflects the growing emancipation and confidence of local govern-

ments that they are able to play a useful and necessary role on the international stage. It is time to have a closer look into the role national associations of municipalities play in the field of municipal international policy and cooperation nowadays.

3. State of affairs of the role of national associations of municipalities

The three classical roles of national local government associations and a brand new

Box 1 | CIB Working Group of UCLG

The UCLG Working Group on Capacity and Institution Building builds on a practitioners tradition within UCLG's founding organisations. The Working Group brings together professional practitioners from Local Government Associations (LGA) and individual local governments active in the field of Municipal International Cooperation (MIC) and Association Capacity Building (ACB) and local government and public sector reform programmes. The committee serves as a technical resource base for political committees of UCLG, and is linked to the Committee on Decentralised Cooperation. The CIB Working Group aims to discuss and exchange information on developments in MIC and ACB programmes, especially those focussed on development cooperation, in order to enhance the quality of this work, and to coordinate activities and programmes in order to avoid overlap and duplication of efforts. The CIB Working Group is trying to enrich discussions amongst local government practitioners involved in development cooperation and is fostering dialogue and coordination amongst members of UCLG involved in development cooperation initiatives. In order to enhance the quality of the development work and to contribute to donor coordination and aid effectiveness the following concrete activities are taking place:

- at least two annual meetings of the most active local government associations and cities in this field;
- active promotion of information sharing through an interactive website (www.cities-localgovernments.org/committees/CIB) and a compendium in which an overview is given about who is doing what and where;
- production of a position paper on aid effectiveness (Smith, 2008);
- support to the drafting of a UCLG charter on Decentralised Cooperation, expected to be produced in 2009;
- active programme coordination in 4 pilot countries: Mali, Ghana, Nicaragua and Burkina Faso; the local government associations in the North together with their partner local government associations in the South coordinate the sharing of information on country strategies, sector analysis, content programming and identify opportunities for joint program planning, delivery and monitoring; each six months a programme report card is prepared and shared.

The CIB Working Group is chaired by Peter King, director of VNG International of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, and co-chaired by Jim Kehoe, director of the International Centre for Municipal Development of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The CIB is supported by Renske Steenbergen, staff officer of UCLG who is stationed in the office of UCLG in Barcelona; a staff position financed by VNG International.

emerging role apply to their functioning in the field of municipal international policy too:

3.1. Representation of the interests of the members

Although some national associations have not even approached the subject of municipal international policy or municipal international cooperation, the majority of national associations represent the interest of their members also internationally. Nearly all European and Latin American national associations are members of UCLG in order to reflect the position of the local governments in their countries. In addition to this the representative functions are exercised in organisations like FLACMA, CEMR, Congress of Local Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Committee of the Regions of the European Union. In addition to this they defend the international interest of their members vis-à-vis the central government in their own country. The lobby is focussed on defending the legal autonomy of their members also in the international work, on getting political and professional recognition for the role local governments can play in the international arena as well as on getting additional funding for local governments to run international cooperation projects. It often entails contacts with the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, European Affairs, Development Cooperation and the Interior as well as a lobby towards the Parliament and the staff of relevant line ministries. Especially in the case where the national association started to play a significant role in municipal international cooperation they have to advocate the interest of the membership also to other tiers of government, to the non governmental development organisations as well as to the business community. For example the chair of VNG, together with the chair of the board of directors of VNG and the director of VNG

International, the international cooperation agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities meet once every two years the Ministers for Development Cooperation and European Affairs to discuss issues of municipal international cooperation. In the past period excellent cooperation relations have been maintained with the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: a constructive dialogue takes place about issues like accountability, aid effectiveness, decentralisation, strengths and weaknesses of municipal international cooperation which also resulted in contributions of VNG International staff to policy documents of the Ministry. Furthermore VNG International organises bi-annual meetings with the spokespersons for develop cooperation in Parliament and has regular contacts with the national association of Provinces and the union of Water Boards as well as with the most important development organisations in The Netherlands.

3.2. Service provider for the member municipalities

With the growth of municipal involvement in international affairs many national associations have developed a broad range of services for the membership in this field. In order to give insight to this service it might be interesting to list 10 different services VNG International provides to the members of the VNG:

- Collective information supply: regular newsletters to mayors and their staff about relevant developments with regard to municipal international policy;
- Answering individual questions: many questions on international issues including subsidy advice and requests for mediation for international contacts or for thematic knowledge networks from municipalities are answered by VNG staff;
- Publications on relevant international

nal issues: every four years (following the cycle of local government elections) a survey on the state of affairs of municipal international policy and cooperation in The Netherlands is published; other very important publications are the handbook on municipal international policy and the overview of grants and subsidies for international projects which are regularly updated;

- Organise information meetings for selected groups of politicians and staff from local governments about topical issues which can be European subsidy programmes or new government policies; every four years a national congress on municipal international policy is organised;

- Offer training on subjects like project development, the logical framework and project cycle management, the intercultural dimension of international cooperation, etc;

- Presentation of the possibilities for international cooperation in council or committee meetings of the municipality;

- Tailor made advice on international policy papers, selection of international partners, and how to regenerate existing twinings;

- Evaluation studies of existing international partnerships, the impact of international project support or the international policy of the municipality as a whole;

- Management of grant schemes financed by the Dutch government which enables Dutch municipalities to obtain co-finance for their international projects in countries in transition, countries of origin and developing countries;

- Management of websites where municipal international efforts are presented like a website with information about all city twinings and a website with infor-

mation about the Millennium Municipality Campaign (see below) in The Netherlands.

3.3. Offering platforms to the membership for meeting, learning and networking

The platform function, bringing local governments together to exchange views and experiences and to develop joint action, is very important with regard to municipal international policy and cooperation. Several national associations have a tradition to bring all local governments with international contacts in one country together. This could apply as well to bringing the membership together on a thematic base. During such meetings experiences in the twinning relations are exchanged, ideas about the improvement of the relations are shared and problems and opportunities are discussed. As illustration it is good to refer to the fact that VNG International is running a few permanent platforms in which members with twinning relations in the same country meet regularly: a platform for cities with contacts in Morocco, Turkey, Surinam as well as in most of the Central and Eastern European countries. Apart from this there is a platform for contacts with Nicaragua as well. Within the largest grant scheme programme, LOGO South, VNG International has not only the task to assist Dutch municipalities and their partners with developing feasible projects, to monitor the implementation and to evaluate the results. VNG International has also the task to coordinate the municipal interventions in each country, to align the efforts with ongoing projects of other donors and to disseminate results together with the national association in the beneficiary country. Which means that VNG International has to cooperate closely with its members to achieve concrete results together with the partners in countries like South-Africa, Ghana, Namibia, Benin, Mali, Tanzania, Sudan, Indonesia and Surinam.



In order to develop VNG policy in the field of municipal international orientation a national advisory board of mayors and councillors of Dutch municipalities, chaired at the moment by the mayor of Groningen, have been installed which meets 4 times a year and advises VNG assisted or unassisted. A good example of a joint action with the membership of the VNG is the Millennium Municipality Campaign. In 2007 VNG International, after careful advice from VNGs national advisory board on municipal international cooperation, launched a campaign to stimulate

Dutch local governments to become Millennium Municipality and support the UN Millennium Development Goals. Since the start of the campaign already more than 100 Dutch municipalities, often on the initiative of the council, took the decision to become Millennium Municipality and to adopt new policies in this field. Many municipalities decided to initiate new measures like fair trade purchase, actions for CO2 reduction, extra budget for development cooperation as well as to start contacts with a municipal partner in a developing country. Highly interesting is that

Box 2 | Municipal International Cooperation: the LOGO SOUTH Programme in the Netherlands

Together with more than 50 Dutch municipalities VNG International implements the LOGO SOUTH Programme in 17 developing countries. The purpose is to strengthen not only the partner local governments in developing countries of the Dutch municipalities, but also what is called the local government sector that includes local government associations, training institutions for local government, but also national ministries for local government and trade unions for local government employees. The capacity development takes place along similar lines. Four levels are distinguished: the individual level, the institutional level, the sectoral level and the enabling environment. At the first level local government officials and politicians are addressed. The institutional level targets a local government department of a full council. The sectoral level includes all local governments, but also their associations, ministries for local government and local government training institutes. The enabling environment refers to the legislation, regulations, and economical situation in a country. In capacity development at all levels individual people are central. The challenge is to address a higher situated level through individuals, in other words institution development as the ultimate objective. In the LOGO SOUTH Programme the capacity development is addressed by introducing country programmes that form a framework for several city-to-city links that work on the same subject or policy field. This theme or policy field is defined in a participative manner by the city-to-city partnerships and includes also the national association of local government, national ministries and other relevant stakeholders. During implementations of the project activities this allows for exchanges of experiences among the involved and dissemination of results to others. Common challenges can be addressed at a national level. These challenges can vary from obstacles in the national legislation (decentralisation could be further developed) to budget constraints (decentralisation of competences was not followed by decentralisation or transfer of budgets) or lack in the capacity development of one or more of the involved (tasks at the local level or between the different tiers of government can not be fulfilled well). All these challenges become clear in a process in which several projects of city-to-city cooperation are implemented. All projects are based on proper local analysis. The local government projects have realistic purposes and aim for tangible results and sustainability. These projects are monitored in a professional manner by the involved local governments in participating countries. VNG International often in close cooperation with the national association of local governments in the beneficiary country coordinates the different activities,

brings the different players together, offers training and advice to enhance professionalism, evaluates and approves project proposals, makes co-financing available, monitors the implementation, evaluates the project reports, addresses challenges and bottlenecks where possible and takes care together with its Southern partner to disseminate best practices. On an annual basis more than 5 million Euro is available for municipal international cooperation. More information is available on www.vng-international.nl.

Example: LOGO SOUTH Country Programme Nicaragua

Central in the Country Programme Nicaragua are strategic planning, including public housing and municipal taxes. Apart from 15 city-to-city links between The Netherlands and Nicaragua, the Asociación de Municipios con Hermandades entre Nicaragua y Holanda (AMHNH), INIFOM (Government institute for support to local governments), INVUR (National Institute for public housing) and the Dutch Council for City Links Netherlands-Nicaragua (LBSNN) participate in the programme. In the participating municipalities in Nicaragua, the results of the strategic planning process have been included in their multi-year investment budgets and annual budgets. During the programme there is a growing correlation in the relationship between these instruments. Companies and a bank also participate. In the framework of the programme VNG International has enabled LBSNN to establish a pool of experts with Latin American and Spanish speaking Dutch experts who advise the involved municipalities in Nicaragua. Locally, there is increased cooperation and coordination of resources between municipalities, social organisations and the private sector. Managers, personnel and active volunteers of these organisations have undergone training. Processes and methods have been modernised and laid down in a 'system for municipal planning' disseminated by INIFOM. Municipal house building committees have been set up in the Nicaraguan municipalities, supported by a democratic municipal public housing policy. Public housing plans have been formulated in line with national policy and local strategic plans. Improved cooperation between the involved municipalities and the local NGOs and INVUR enables easier access to subsidy, resulting in the development of more (social) housing. The municipalities are booking an annual average increase in income of over 10% from municipal taxes and levies. Administrative information systems have been established and made operational. There is clear evidence of intensified and more horizontal cooperation and interaction between municipalities. Joint lobbies have successfully approached central government and national parliament in seeking support for several themes, including improved tax legislation.

young councillors from different cities created a network of young councillors for the Millennium Development Goals and started with the help of VNG International to extend the network internationally as an extra local force for combating poverty.

3.4. Enforcing quality standards

In many modern democracies we observe a new emerging role of national associations of local governments in the field

of enforcing quality standards. In order to support the claim of local governments and their national associations for further decentralisation and being the first government window for citizens, national associations develop in close cooperation with the membership mechanisms for quality enhancement and quality control. Instruments like benchmarking, peer-to-peer reviews, user groups and support packages to implement quality standards are increasingly used to strengthen the performance of



their membership at large. National associations of local governments in the UK and The Netherlands have recently even established new institutes like the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government (IDeA) in the UK and the Quality Institute Dutch Municipalities (KING) in The Netherlands. As far as I know these new instruments for enforcing quality standards are not yet systematically used to improve the quality of the international policies of local governments. But without doubt it will be very important for improving the performance of local governments in the international arena to apply this new role of national associations to this field of municipal international cooperation as well.

Overlooking the state of affairs of involvement of national associations of local governments in municipal international policy in Europe and Latin America we can observe a great variety in the approaches to this field. Like was described for the VNG above, the choice for a certain approach is most of the time the result of a combination of political discussions and professional capacities. In the end the question is whether the national association has the will and aspiration to perform internationally. Generally speaking we can distinguish four main approaches:

- Approach 1: National local government associations that have a rather detached position to municipal international policy and limit themselves to a formal representation in the municipal international organisations and to providing some basic information and mediation services for their members (this is the case for many local governments associations in Latin America and in the new EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe);

- Approach 2: National local government associations that have adopted a more

or less active policy in this field and fulfil the classical roles of an association as described above also in the field of municipal international policy (this is the case in Austria, Greece, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, a few countries in Latin America as well as the United States);

- Approach 3: National local government associations with active involvement in this field which have succeeded to agree with their national government that central government funding is available to cofinance municipal international cooperation as well as association capacity building projects; some national associations limit their role in the implementation of these financial schemes to giving advice to their membership, while other associations took the responsibility to manage such funding programmes (Belgium, Finland, France, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, UK as well as Canada);

- Approach 4: National local government associations which, most of the time but not always in combination with their active role like described under the 2nd and 3rd approach, have developed consultancy capacity to run international service contracts acquired through public tender procedures; in such assignments the international departments or international agencies of local government associations deliver professional technical assistance for local government capacity building and decentralisation programmes (Denmark, Finland, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UK as well as Canada).

It is good to notice that some countries do not have one strong association, which can act on behalf of all local governments in the country. Competition between different national networks of local governments tends to make their position vis-à-vis central government weaker. Also a federal system with strong regions, like the Län-

der in Germany, has a significant influence on the position of national associations. In some cases the international work is done by specialised networks of local governments like in Italy where the Italian Coordination of Local Authorities for Peace and Human Rights provides services and undertakes international action on behalf of the 700 member municipalities. In a way the same applies to Cités Unies (CUF) in France too.

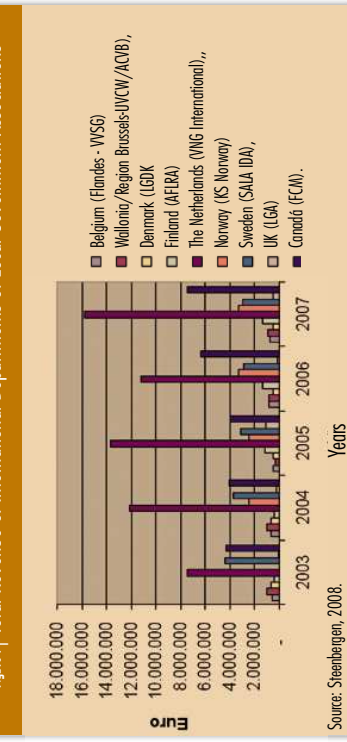
It is remarkable that most national associations, even the ones that adopted active international policies (above described approaches 3 and 4), haven't defined municipal international cooperation as a core task of the association. For instance the VNG has recently formulated 8 key priorities for the local government agenda and the dedication of VNG, but European and international affairs is not one of them. This reflects on the one hand that the local, regional and national orientation of local governments is still far more important than the international one and on the other hand that a lot of progress needs to be made.

How much money is available for the international work? How is the arrangement of the relationship with the Ministry of Foreign Relations? How do they organise the international work? Underneath we will answer those questions for a few of the most active national local government associations on the international scene, because it gives insight in the state of affairs and potentials of their involvement.

Below we can see in figure 1 that the total annual revenue of the most active local government associations in their international work in the period 2003 till 2007 has increased significantly with 56.4%. The national associations in The Netherlands and Canada have by far the largest international turnover, but the turnover of the national associations in Norway, Sweden and Finland is substantial too. However, the total turnover of all the most active associations together is rather modest: in 2007 they spend together an amount of 33.5 million Euro in their international work.

It is also interesting to look at the total value of the shares received from the

Figure 1 | Total Revenue of International Departments of Local Government Associations



national government compared to the total sum of the total international turnover of the different local government associations (see figure 2). It is clear that the greater part of the money for the international work of local government associations comes from their national governments. However, it is important to notice that this share is decreasing. In 2003 the share from national government compared with the total sum of revenues for international work was 63.5% and this was decreased to 55% in 2007. A small part of the rest of the money for this work is financed by the local government associations themselves from the membership fees. Another part comes from other donor organisations. In case of VNG International funds are increasingly coming from the EU as well as from other agencies like USAID, UN and other bilateral donors.

With regard to the programmes focusing on municipal international cooperation,

three simplified categories can be identified (Steenbergen 2008):

A) National governments that channel all funds available for international cooperation initiatives of local governments through the national local government associations (i.e. Finland, the Netherlands, Wallonia and with a different logic in Canada too). In other words, in principle there are no other financial means available for municipal international cooperation from national government. (See figure N° 3)

It should be noted that the programmes do not cover all the costs and that local governments need to co-finance the projects. In case of The Netherlands this is even obligatory.

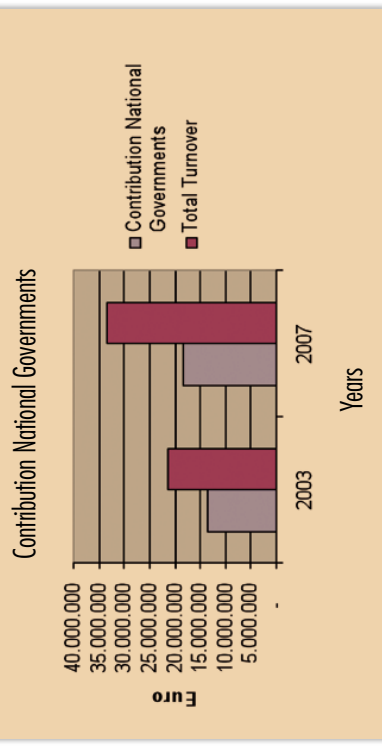
B) Part of the funds for municipal international cooperation is channelled through the associations, whereas another part is allocated to the municipalities directly. This is the case for Sweden and Norway. The case of Flanders is in-between the first and the second scheme, as the fe-

deral programme channels the money via the LGA to the local governments, whereas the Flemish programme channels money directly to local governments and only asks for support of the VVSG. (See figure N° 4)

C) A limited role for local government associations, often due to a lack of resources for municipal international cooperation from the national government. Available funds for municipal international cooperation are channelled directly to the municipalities, though the amounts are relatively small compared to the funds that local governments mobilize themselves. The association does not channel funds, but mainly has an advisory role and supports and trains local government staff in the implementation of their international projects or programmes (i.e. Denmark, Germany, France, Spain and UK). (See figure N° 5)

The local government associations that adopted active international policies have organised their work through the establishment of professional international departments or

Figure 2 | Total share of National Government funds in the total revenue of International Departments of Local Government Associations in 2003 and 2007



Box 3 | Association Capacity Building of VNG International

With the financial support of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, VNG International aims to institutionally strengthen local government associations in order to improve their functioning as umbrella organisations for local government in developing countries. In other words, that these associations become better in representing the interest of the membership, better service providers to their members so that these in turn become better basic service providers to their citizens and that these associations become more capable in offering a platform to the local governments in the respective countries. The association capacity building of VNG International works primarily on a partnership basis with local government associations in four regions: West (ANCB-Benin, AMBF-Burkina Faso, MALAG-Ghana, AMM-Mali, UAEL-Senegal) and East Africa (ABELO-Burundi, ALGAK-Kenya, RALGA-Rwanda), South East Asia (NLC/S-Cambodia, ADMASH-Indonesia, MUAMH-Nepal) and Central America (CO-MUPRES-El Salvador, ANAM-Guatemala, AMUNIC-Nicaragua). Along side the partnerships some resources are reserved



for a fund where other non-partner associations can apply for the implementation of a comparatively small institutional strengthening project for their association. Organisational assessments of the partner organisations were carried out and from the basis for the work plans as these showed the relatively weak and strong points of the involved local government associations. Attention has been given to what other aid programmes already offer to the involved associations. Fitting within their own plans - in most cases worked in multi-annual strategic plans - and focussed on 4 result areas (lobby function, service delivery, financial sustainability, better communication methods with the membership and internal administrative management capacities) targets are set and activities drafted each programme year. In a participatory manner on the basis of progress made in the past year and comparing this against up-dated objectives of these associations, the objectives and activities for the next year are formulated. The involved associations in each region are in varying stages of development and exchange of experience between them is a crucial part of the reciprocal learning process. VNG International is not only the programme coordinator but also functions as a resource. The resources it brings to the programme are two-fold: VNG itself is a local government association with nearly 100 years of experience, and the VNG has been supporting other local government associations around the world in similar ACB trajectories involving some 60 associations of local governments in the past 15 years. Part of the coordination work is decentralised to the four regions where we work with regional coordinators. Memoranda of understanding between VNG International and the partner associations are signed annually with an annual work plan as basis. For the identified expertise input that is needed terms of reference are drafted, the adequate expertise is then identified and activities undertaken. A colleague-to-colleague approach is often used. Institutional strengthening of the partner local government associations takes place by:

- Making use of resources of well-developed associations of municipalities through expert missions, online exchange of documents and experience, etc.;
- Making use of experience gained from other ACB activities;
- Mutual learning among associations in the same region; to enable mutual learning regional workshops are organised that focus on one or two well-elaborated themes;
- Facilitating activities for the benefit of the member local governments with a focus on service delivery from the association to its membership.

VNG International takes a demand driven approach. This is appreciated by the partner associations, who are not always used to work that way with other implementing or donor organisations. The fact that VNG clearly focuses on the strengthening of the organisations themselves is new to some of them and has made them more conscious of what needs improvement. Other external organisations often approach them for project implementation at the local government

level of the country. At the same time the partner associations have come to appreciate the advantages of working as a group during the regional workshops and welcome the exchange of experiences within the region. One of the efforts is to organise regional workshops together with other implementing organisations like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in order to align our work. Based on the practical experience five titles in a series of guidelines for local government associations have been published: strategic planning, communication, setting up an association, service provision and lobbying. They are available in English, Spanish and French in hard and soft copy and can be ordered via the website of VNG International: www.vnginternational.nl. On an annual base more than 1 million Euro is available for the ACB activities.

Example: support to ANAM in Guatemala

ANAM is a private autonomous entity, established in 1960. All 333 municipalities of Guatemala are automatic member of ANAM. The current board of directors consists of 15 mayors and is elected for a one-year period. The last municipal elections were held in 2007. ANAM -with technical support from VNG International- lobbied to get decentralisation and municipal autonomy higher on the agenda of the political parties. In July 2008 the president of Guatemala, Mr. Alvaro Colom, signed an agreement on local development and decentralisation to confirm his support to municipal development. ANAM does not have a multi-annual strategic plan. One of the key issues here is the change of the board of directors each year, which obviously diminishes its interest in longer term planning. ANAM finds itself still in a development phase and is supported by only a few international donors of which only two others than VNG International are interested in the institutional strengthening of ANAM itself (i.e. the Fundación Demuca of the Spanish and EU funded Programme Municipios Democráticos). Donor dependency is however hardly a risk for ANAM since only 7% of its income comes from international donors. They have a secured membership fee income as this is directly transferred from the national budget of ANAM. ANAM has planned to improve income coming out of self-financing events, overhead on projects and an additional national government support programme. ANAM delivers a very limited amount of services to its members (legal advice and forestal services). There are limited options to deliver more services because two central government agencies already deliver services for free. ANAM participated actively in the ACB regional workshops which gave them the opportunity to get acquainted with key issues of running a local government association and to identify their own longer term priorities. The elections of a board for one year will change after 2010 in a two-year period. For 2009 ANAM plans to establish departmental associations in order to have more participation of the membership and to better provide them with really tailor made services. VNG International with its experts and regional coordinator will support them in developing their service delivery strategy and to increase membership participation. The operational structure of ANAM will be strengthened as well. The departmental associations are going to play an important role in strengthening the municipal lobby at national level by providing the national association with input in position statements from each region in Guatemala.



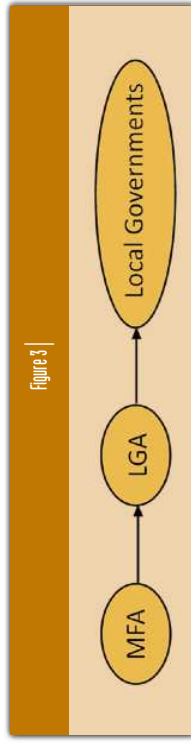


Figure 3 |

even daughter companies. Local government associations with approaches 1 or 2 to their international work limit themselves often to having one or more international relations officers. One can find well-organised international departments in the national associations of Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Spain and the UK. The associations in Sweden and The Netherlands have established, in addition to their international department, special daughter companies - respectively SALA IDA and VNG International- which are completely focussed on the international work. The national associations have a 100% share in their subsidiaries. The situation in the Canadian association FCM is rather similar with their International Centre for Municipal Development which has a lot of autonomy but is still an integral part of FCM. The Finnish association is majority shareholder of the Finnish Consulting Group which is a large consultancy firm which does also decentralisation and local government capacity building projects, but consultancy work for national governments and the private sector too. The municipal international cooperation programme is not executed by this consulting firm but by the international department of the association.

Concluding, we can say that the situation in the various countries is very different and that it is somewhat difficult to make a comparison of the situation of the different local government associations. Clearly, FCM and VNG International dispose of the most

financial means, and still show a significant increase of their budgets, whereas other associations are operating on a smaller scale, sometimes limited to municipal international cooperation and sometimes offering technical assistance for association capacity building or decentralisation projects as well. A small group of advanced local government associations is starting to receive more funds, but the majority of national local government associations is still not very active in the field of municipal international policy. In Latin America structural national government funding for municipal international cooperation is as far as I can observe not yet existing which limits the role national associations could play in coordinating and supporting the international efforts of their members. As Salomon describes, there are increasingly local governments in Latin America with a consistent and structural international programme but national associations have not yet developed capacity and policies to support this structurally (2009). Fernández, the director of the Association of Mexican Municipalities (AMMAC) said recently: "exploring the possibilities for a coherent policy in the field of decentralised cooperation in cooperation with our ministry of Foreign Affairs is still brand new for us, but an interesting opportunity" (2008). Nevertheless it is significant to observe that local government associations are receiving funds for municipal international cooperation and association capacity building and that the aspiration and political will to perform internationally is growing with

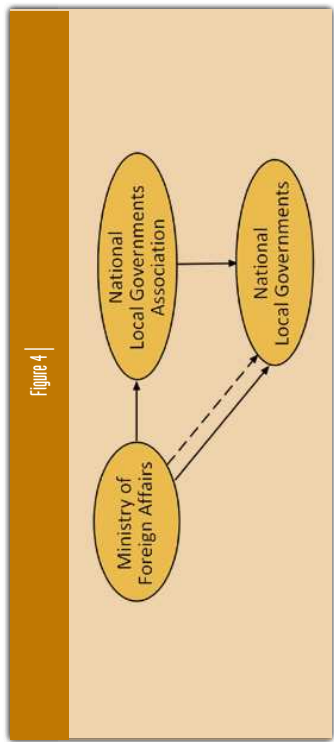


Figure 4 |

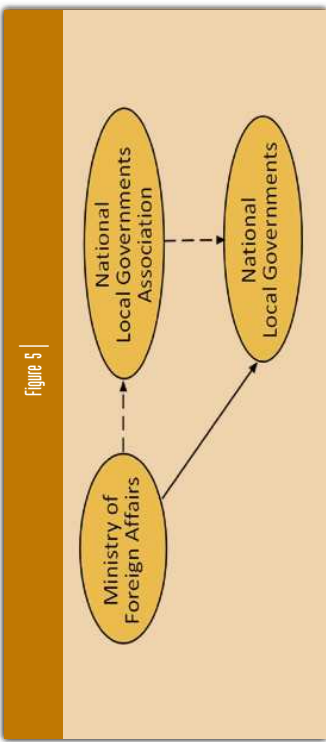


Figure 5 |

the national associations of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, UK in the lead at the moment.

4. Importance of the role of national associations of municipalities

Let us immediately distinguish two aspects of the importance of the role of national

associations that often cause confusion. In discussions about development aid those two aspects are frequently tangled. On the one hand we have the issue of the importance of the national association of municipalities in the process of development, in decentralisation and improved service delivery. On the other hand we have the issue of the importance of the involvement of the national association in municipal international policy and cooperation in order to make this ins-



trument more effective and efficient. Make it fit in with the aid effectiveness agenda.

Let us start with the first aspect. My assumption is that the staff of many international donor agencies and ministries for foreign affairs involved in sector wide approaches and decentralisation programmes do not have a sufficient understanding of how influential national associations of local governments are in modern democratic countries and which instruments and arrangements are in place in those countries to safeguard a proper local government involvement in law and policy development. In order to cut a long story short: National local government associations are crucial organisations for having an effective and constructive policy dialogue between central and local government, for systematically defending the interest of local government and for practical service delivery to improve the quality of the performance of local government. In strong democratic countries with strong local self government one can observe the existence of strong national associations of local governments. The staff of such associations counts easily between 100 and 500 officers. It is of course interesting to observe that exactly those national associations developed active policies in support of municipal international policy.

The reverse side is that many national associations of local governments in developing countries are still rather weak. Their capacity is fragile and their visibility is nearly absent. They often even do not represent the local government voice and tend to follow the policies of the central government. Which is of course a serious handicap for the highly complicated process of decentralisation: the fundamental restructuring of competences between tiers of government in order to democratise the country, to im-

prove the service delivery, to enable economic development and to combat poverty. In this process a well-functioning national association is extremely conducive because it gives ownership and stimulates local leadership, it offers a partner to discuss the strategy with, it involves all local stakeholders, it can play a crucial role in building the capacity of the local governments and last but not least it enhances the possibilities for monitoring and evaluation. These are exactly the principles that should be in place to ensure a successful decentralisation process according to the literature (Nibbering and Swart, 2008).

All this often provokes the 'chicken and egg' discussion: involving a strong association is useful, but associations in developing countries are too weak to involve, so they are not involved which keeps them weak. Therefore it is a collective responsibility to create an enabling environment for national associations of local governments in developing countries to gain strength on behalf of their membership. Which means for the donor community that in order to harmonize decentralisation and urban sector approaches and include the local voice they have to enable and allow that the national associations of local governments in the beneficiary countries are going to play a role in policy formulation and implementation on behalf of their membership – even if they are weak for the time being. Which even means that donor agencies have to adjust their programme implementation strategies in order to enable the governments in the beneficiary countries to consult the local government sector properly. In this respect it is promising that a prominent policy maker of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently wrote: "Taking national processes as the point of departure implies that there may be good reasons to

slow down the pace of implementation of a sector programme, rather than speed it up because of donor spending pressure or the urge to harmonise. For instance, when sector programmes threaten progress in democratic decentralisation, or when key political or other stakeholders are not on board, or when we don't know where the money is going. Donors cannot substitute for domestic accountability systems. Nor can they take care of capacity development. The Netherlands, as a trusted 'investor' in sector development which has worked closely with partner governments, should not be afraid to demand the inclusion of, for example, local government programmes in joint sector funding arrangements, and a stronger focus on capacity development at decentralised levels." (Van Reesch 2008). Which means in my view as well: no 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers' and no 'National Decentralisation Strategies' anymore without sufficient consultation and participation of the national association of municipalities.

While fortunately enough donor attention for local government associations in developing countries is growing, two observations should be made (Risseuw 2006). The donor tendency to focus on pilots mostly in service provision at the local level poses a risk. Many donors tend to use the local government association to reach the local government level without having sufficient attention for the need to strengthen the institution of the association itself. When a donor supports a local government association in order to build its capacity and to perform better on its three most important tasks, also this may bring a risk. The risk of replacement. The association of local governments for a certain length of time and for a certain amount of money is secure, and it is no longer fully

dependent on fee contributions from its members. Worse, the members themselves may interpret the arrival of the donor as a sign that fee payments are no longer necessary. In order to avoid this risk a proper association capacity building project approach should entail an incentive for the beneficiary local government association to work towards sustainability in the longer term. Also during project implementation the risk exists that the association is paying more attention to the donor agenda than to its own mission and that of its members. At the same time some realism is called for: the average national context in which these local government associations operate, the average characteristics of the member local governments with little or no real access to own revenues, make that obtaining sustainability for these organisations and at the same time performing as demanded by their members, is a long-term process. Also here radical changes do not happen overnight.

The importance of addressing the needs of mostly fragile national associations of local governments brings the relevance of association capacity building programmes executed by more advanced national associations of municipalities on the table. Increasingly it is understood that involving the weaker associations in peer-to-peer contacts, in international encounters, but also in critical cooperation processes with other associations might help to accelerate their process of gaining more strength. That is why association capacity building programmes are more and more part of municipal international cooperation programmes. For, both interventions can strengthen each other. National associations who feel ownership for support programmes for their membership can help to focus and align the assistance. They can disseminate results of municipal international cooperation to their members as well. The other way round



involving associations in such programmes will have impact on their understanding of what is going on at the local level and what kind of legal and financial constraints are hampering further development.

Then the second aspect. Are national local government associations key stakeholders for enhancing municipal international policy and strengthening municipal international cooperation? Well, as explained above, most of them are not yet. But they can certainly be like the 'avant-garde' shows. And they should be if we want to improve the quality and effectiveness of municipal international cooperation and increase the benefits of the international orientation of local governments. This is not the place to discuss once again all the strengths and weaknesses of municipal international cooperation. There is a growing recognition for the high potential of municipal international cooperation to address the development needs local governments in the world are facing (Konrad Audenauer Stiftung 2006, CEMR 2008, Clarke 2008, Commission of the European Communities 2008). However, what can national associations of municipalities do to overcome the identified weaknesses and to fulfil the mentioned strategic challenges and recommendations. As pointed out by Gareché the challenge for municipal international cooperation today is "to find a suitable level of coherence and coordination, without the need for one of these to submit itself to another and to respect individual visibility and specificities" (2008). He formulates as well 7 recommendations which I interpret freely as follows: transform the values of municipal international cooperation beyond the relief aid vision, move towards an even greater professionalism, promote more and better coordination, increase the availability of financial means, enhance the reciprocity and

ownership, adjust to the principle of multi-level governance with different types of local and regional governments involved and finally define the relationship that should exist between national governments and international organisations and the emerging role of local governments in the international arena.

National local government associations are well-positioned, if they have the political will, to work with their membership to formulate joint answers to the mentioned challenges and to follow the advice. Even stronger: they are established by the local governments to do so. Taking the lead in this process of enhancing the quality and effectiveness of municipal international cooperation and supporting the global orientation of their members is part of their 'raison d'être'. As Buis explains national local government associations are in "the ideal position to set up conditions, advice and to initiate exchange of experiences between different local governments and other tiers of governments regarding city-to-city cooperation" (2008). And he argues as well that a strong and accountable local government association can develop and guide a nation wide approach on municipal international cooperation. These are not only words. He describes the innovative model VNG International has developed for its major municipal international programme LOGO South in reaction to the evaluation of former programmes by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), an independent body of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (IOB 2004). He argues that ownership by national local government associations and involved local governments is a key success factor which is unfortunately often lacking. FCMs core international programme, the Municipal Partnership Programme, has also features that answer to the formulated challenges.

Moreover, in the framework of UCLG the most active national associations of local governments are already active to further professionalize and improve the coordination of the international work. In the Working Group on Capacity and Institution Building the professional staff of active national associations and cities are meeting regularly to exchange experiences with technical assistance and project support, to renew views and visions and to make concrete mutual arrangements to coordinate the different programmes and projects, like described in box 1. In line with the Paris Agenda on Aid Effectiveness there is a sincere search for synergy. A rising awareness that spending public money on a growing number of incoherent international interventions by local governments is not a wise approach. It is seen as a shared challenge to develop a common professional identity as local governments and national associations that wish to achieve concrete results in development cooperation together and to contribute to improved accountability and thus to aid effectiveness, in order to show the world the added value municipal international cooperation together and to contribute to aid effectiveness. This is done in the conviction that if it is done well, it won't solve the urgent issues of poverty, conflict and violation of human rights on its own, but for sure it brings a crucial ally to the front.

5. Future challenges for the role of national association in municipal international policies

Between the lines, the careful reader has already discovered many challenges for national associations of local governments to support and guide the emerging role of local governments in the international arena. This article will finish with listing the five most important future challenges.

5.1. Increased involvement and ownership

An increasing number of national associations should embark on developing a more active policy to support their membership with their international work. As argued above national associations can, if there is the political will, guide a nation wide approach on municipal international cooperation. More active associations will create more substance. Especially in developing countries more ownership for the direction of municipal international cooperation is required. At this moment only the national associations of South Africa, Mexico, Ecuador and Colombia participate in the CIB working group of UCLG. Increased ownership can lead to more effective assistance for their membership, more finances and more visibility of their association. In the end all this should go beyond aid and assistance. It is the task of local government associations to show that they offer more than the classical develop cooperation; what they offer is a worldwide network which can draw colleagues from the South in the daily reality of local governments elsewhere. A network that enables cities in the South to cooperate with partners elsewhere in the world like many cities in the North work actively together in thematic networks to realize concrete results in their cities. A network based on peer to peer collaboration whereby cities and their associations support each other by sharing experiences and providing hands on advice. A network that facilitates cities in the South to become more attractive for talented young people to work for because it opens a window to the global world. A network which shows that international cooperation between local governments is a professional and reciprocal way of enhancing the quality of your municipal performance. This cooperation, including important South-South contacts, needs resources and attention to realize its promising potential.



5.2 Coordination is crucial but be careful!

Coordination is crucial for the effectiveness of aid and assistance. Local government associations can contribute to a better coordination. However, it is extremely difficult like other organisations from the human inclination to compete with others and plant their own flag. Frankly speaking local government associations in developing countries are often not very eager to coordinate and align activities. For, in the end it often limits their space to manoeuvre. Last but not least the bureaucratic conditions of the donors hamper sincere efforts of local government associations to align their work. Nevertheless: walk the talk. More and better coordination is a challenge that should materialize in the daily development work of local government associations. But be careful. Though coordination is crucial, the strong characteristics of municipal international cooperation, its closeness to local initiatives, should not be lost. Alignment and harmonization should not lead to one-sided top-down working relations.

5.3 Modesty

Modesty is required. The number of staff and the finances for municipal international policy and development cooperation are still very limited compared with the development industry and the national and international capacities available for foreign and development policy. The world organization of local governments, UCLG, has a staff of just over 15 people with which they have to fill in the partnership with the UN agencies. Compared with the national non governmental development organisations in The Netherlands, VNG International is with 50 staff and a turnover of 16 million Euro

a very small player. As said above even the very active national associations of municipalities haven't defined municipal international policies of development cooperation as a key priority. As long as this is the case, is modesty appropriate.

5.4 Democratic legitimacy

Democratic legitimacy for municipal international policy and cooperation is crucial. Without more public support for the international role of their local representatives municipal international cooperation won't get its full strength and will the efforts of a national association of local governments in this field be in vain.

5.5 Multi-level governance approach

The call on national governments and international agencies should be done more vigorously: if there is a serious attempt on their level to develop a response strategy that will allow capitalisation and maximization of local governments as partners in development policies they should extend their cooperation with national associations of local governments. If they really succeed to align their budget and sector support amongst themselves, to involve national associations in the beneficiary countries seriously in the policy dialogue and to invite experienced national associations of local governments from the North in tailor made capacity building programmes, they introduce a multi-level governance cooperation which can lead to sufficient means and capacity for service delivery and poverty reduction at the local level. That is how national governments and international development agencies can play a decisive role in making international cooperation between local governments a powerful instrument to contribute to achieving the development goals.

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