Making Decentralization Reform Work:

Opportunities and Innovations for Local Governance and Service Delivery

Empowered lives.
Resilient nations

International Conference
2-3 December 2015, Kyiv, Ukraine

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Executive Summary

Local governance and public service delivery is a key component of the international development agenda and is crucial for working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery is the most direct way to improve people's lives, in particular the lives of vulnerable groups. The success of the seventeen SDGs agreed by Member States in September 2015 rests in large part on effective and efficient systems of local governance.[1] The implementation of the 2030 agenda will greatly depend on localisation of the Goals, through local action and leadership, in coordination with all other levels of governance. Effective local governance systems are critical in accelerating comprehensive service delivery and catalysing inclusive and green growth, including for vulnerable groups, and are the most direct way of improving people's trust in government.

Reflecting the current challenges faced by Ukraine in implementing its decentralisation reforms, and to support Ukraine in defining its own capacity building and policy agenda, a two-day "Making Decentralisation Reform Work" conference was held in Kyiv in December 2015. The conference brought together over 150 local development experts, civil society activists and representatives of national and local governments from over 20 countries to discuss opportunities and innovations for local governance and service delivery.

A number of countries in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (ECIS) are implementing reforms aimed at decentralized, more accountable and empowered local governments that are able to meet citizen's expectations for better public services and local development. Sharing regional experiences and knowledge exchange about such reforms provided fruitful lessons learned, which can be adapted by others to suit each local context.

The need for a carefully planned, inclusive reform process that takes into account the needs and requirements of citizens is crucial. Citizens need to be heard. Reforms need to be planned in an inclusive manner, with local authority and citizen consultations held early on in the process.

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1   See, for instance: "The Role of Local Governments in the Effective Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals" (2015), UNCDF, Available at: http://www.uncdf.org/en/role-local-governments-effective-implementation-sustainable-development-goals, accessed 28 February 2016.

In many countries in the ECIS region, governments have maintained centralized control over fiscal responsibility, leaving local government units heavily dependent on financial transfers. To strengthen local governance and to push for more effective local service delivery, fiscal decentralization needs to be a focal point of reform efforts. Local governments must be able to decide how social services are provided, for example. To do this, local governments need better capacities to prepare, plan and cost-out complex, multiyear investments in order to ensure service delivery. To support this, policies can be implemented to create incentives to increase the revenue collection of local governments. For example, government transfers, which often make up an important part of local government revenues, can be partially based on the fiscal capacity of local authorities. As transfers depend on the local revenue base, they create an interest for local governments to improve and work on revenue collection. A stable income for local authorities can be ensured through a fixed national revenue sharing system and local government can be given greater autonomy over local government expenditure, thereby providing further incentives.

One challenging but successful approach to decentralisation in the region is through territorial and administrative reform. Territorial and administrative reform aims to empower new administrative units by enhancing their capability to provide high quality and timely services to citizens and increasing the efficiency of local governments' resource management. The essence of this reform is to form administrative units in a way that they assure local service delivery and inclusive governance, while being efficient and financially sustainable. This process is not only a mathematical problem of optimization, but also a question of political economy. Though not a substitute for territorial and administrative reform, mechanisms of inter-municipal cooperation can also provide a way to reform service delivery and stimulate local development, which is independent from complex decentralization reforms. The national institutional context is an important factor in the characteristics of inter-municipal cooperation. The number of administrative tiers within a country, the distribution of responsibilities between the different tiers of government, the scope and autonomy of local government, and the number and size of the municipalities to a great extent determine the necessity and possible advantages of cooperation.

Local governance should be inclusive with active citizen participation and engagement by women and vulnerable groups. To achieve people-centred public services, local governments need to offer mechanisms for public participation and ways to gather feedback from citizens. Innovative ways to engage citizens and foster participation are a key demand of local governance practitioners. Harnessing technology and the use of e-governance services is an efficient way to get in touch with citizens and provide local governance services, while maximizing efficiencies and minimizing corruption vulnerabilities.

Experiences show that one-stop service provision centres at the local level enable governments to provide effective and efficient services to its citizens, where the services are grouped together and offered in one place, which is the advantage of e-governance tools and digital solutions.

An open, transparent dialogue can help build political consensus, and citizen participation and engagement can assist in identifying innovative solutions. Civil society organizations (CSO) involvement can ensure accountability as well as assistance in the provision of people-centred, gender-sensitive, non-discriminatory service provision. In order to strengthen the partnership between local governments and civil society organisations, it needs to be institutionalised by enabling greater civic engagement in decision-making and improvement of local service delivery.

In most countries in the region, there is the need to enable local government entities to assess and reduce their vulnerability to corruption, using methodologies which have shown successes around the world, from Bolivia to the Western Balkans. It is important in this regard that CSOs are involved to support the facilitation and implementation of the process and that they play a central role in creating an enabling environment for reducing corruption risks in institutions at the local governance level.

1. Introduction

The success of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals agreed by Member States in September 2015 rests in large part on effective and efficient systems of local governance. [2] Effective local governance systems are crucial in accelerating comprehensive service delivery, including for vulnerable groups, and are the most direct way of improving people's lives, employment, and other opportunities and their daily experience of government. The implementation of the Agenda 2030 will greatly depend on localisation of the Goals through local action, decision-making and leadership in coordination with all other levels of government.
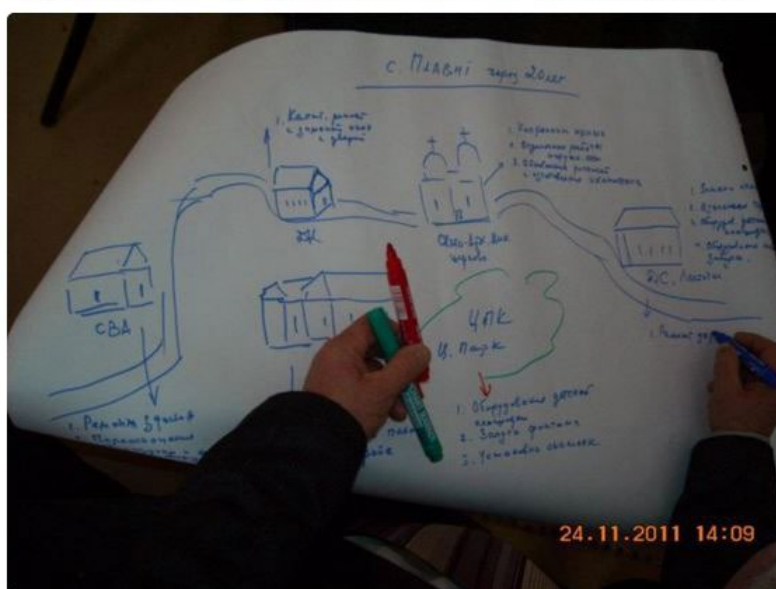
Source: Twitter

Local governance is defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as the combined set of institutions, systems and processes at the subnational level through which services are provided to citizens and through which the latter articulate their interests and needs, mediate their differences, and exercise their human rights and obligations. Delivering services

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2   See, for instance: "The Role of Local Governments in the Effective Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals" (2015), UNCDF, Available at: http://www.uncdf.org/en/role-local-governments-effective-implementation-sustainable-development-goals, accessed 28 February 2016.

to citizens is at the heart of what most government agencies do. Local government services are therefore critical in shaping trust in and perceptions of the public sector. For UNDP, local governance is a political, social, institutional and economic model to achieve better development outcomes at the local level and a development outcome in itself, as a 'good' or 'democratic' local governance system upholds principles of equality, inclusion, accountability and the rule of law.

A number of countries in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (ECIS) region are currently working towards decentralized, streamlined and empowered local governments. Local governments are increasingly under pressure to meet citizen's expectations for public services and better livelihoods, and ensure transparent, effective and accountable government action that takes their voices and views into account in decision-making and creates vibrant local economic development. While there have been success stories of local governance reform, many countries are still facing challenges and are struggling with policy implementation. There is great potential for countries to learn from each other, both in the field of local governance in general, but also in relation to decentralization reform efforts.

To foster such an exchange, UNDP and the Government of Ukraine co-hosted a "Making Decentralization Reform Work: Opportunities and Innovations for Local Governance and Service Delivery" conference in Kyiv, Ukraine on 2-3 December 2015. Almost 150 experts and practitioners from over 20 countries came together to share experiences and elaborate on good practices and challenges in the context of decentralization reform, local governance and service delivery. The conference brought together representatives from different levels of governance – mayors, city councillors, governors and deputy ministers – with senior local governance experts and civil society representatives. They were joined by representatives from UNDP Country Offices throughout the region. The largest group of participants naturally came from Ukraine and included representatives from different regions and local municipalities; twenty-five (25) mayors, several governors, representatives of regional governments and members of parliament attended.

The aim of the conference was to share best practices and exchange ideas in decentralization and democratic local governance. It was held in Ukraine as the country is currently engaged in a process of decentralisation that has attracted considerable attention. The determination of the government and the willingness of the general public to adopt best practices in the field of decentralized governance is high, but the challenges in terms of design and implementation are significant. The on-going decentralization process was taken up as a priority by the post-Maidan government in 2014, and has included a wide range of efforts including constitutional reform, territorial-administrative amalgamation, fiscal decentralization and tax reform.

Presentations on local governance reforms, participatory decision-making, civic engagement and people-centred services came from Bolivia, Moldova, Hungary, Romania, Den-

mark, Turkey, Georgia, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. One of the objectives of the conference was to launch the Anti-Corruption Training (ACT) project, a regional, local governance anti-corruption initiative funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania and implemented jointly by UNDP and the Partners for Local Development Foundation. The European Union Delegation to Ukraine used the opportunity to announce a new, European multi-million Euro programme targeting administration and accountability at the local level (U-LEAD).

Jelena @Jelena1Jelena · 2 Dec 2015
Decentralization #Ukraine Welcome to a construction site. Berend de Groot
#KyivDEC15

3   2

Source: Twitter

This report presents a synthesis of the discussions and gathers the solutions and approaches presented throughout the event. It begins by setting the conference in the context of Ukraine's major decentralization reform efforts. It then links local governance to the challenges of the global development agenda. It continues by discussing reform efforts, with a specific focus on decentralization reform and financial sustainability of local units. The report turns to look at different mechanisms and approaches to effective and efficient local service provision. Benefitting from the experiences of different countries across the Europe and CIS region, the report considers territorial and administrative setups, inter-municipal cooperation and local economic development, service delivery by civil society actors, e-governance tools in local service delivery and ways to increase citizen participation and civic engagement, with a focus on gender responsiveness. Special attention is paid to the fight against corruption at the local level by looking into how actors from civil society can facilitate anti-corruption reforms and efforts in local administrations. Finally, the report concludes with a summary of the key issues emerging from the conference.

2. The Ukraine context

Ukraine is currently in the midst of what is likely the biggest decentralization reform that Europe has seen in a generation. Reforming a system that has been relatively unchanged since the end of the Soviet Union provides a major challenge for the entire country; local and regional governments in particular are facing substantial changes. Vyacheslav Negoda, First Deputy Minister of the Regional Development Ministry in Ukraine, showed that decentralization reforms are set to transform 22 government sectors, including health care and

education, which are two of the most centralized sectors. The ultimate aim of local governance and decentralization reform is to ensure regional and social development and the distribution of financial resources to all levels of government. It is not only a political process but also a process of economic development. While reforms might have been long to initiate, concrete steps are being taken by the government towards substantial decentralization. Some legal changes have already been passed; others are waiting to go through parliament, including constitutional changes. As agreeing on reforms and passing them through parliament was already a difficult step, implementing these measures properly will be an even bigger challenge. Moreover, several open issues remain unresolved.

Ukraine currently has a very fragmented local governance system, with over 11,500 local government units. The Ukrainian government initiated a process of voluntary amalgamation, trying to create incentives for local government units to merge. So far, the programme has had a reasonably successful start, but it remains to be seen whether a voluntary amalgamation mechanism will lead to the necessary reduction in local government units and whether the newly formed units will prove to be sustainable.

The decentralization process in Ukraine is also hampered by the on-going military conflict in the east of the country. The conflict-affected regions are currently unable to carry out democratic elections and local service provision is *de facto* impossible in some parts of the Donbas region. Other regions are also affected as relations between government and citizens are strained in several regions and as many non-conflict-affected regions face an influx of internally displaced people (IDPs).

One of the biggest points of contestation remains the field of fiscal decentralization. Local and regional governments are concerned about the sustainability of proposed changes to funding rules. They are worried about getting the autonomy they need to be able to use budgets for their own policy. Currently, for example, not all local government units have the right to take loans themselves, but are to a large extent reliant on state transfers. One demand is that state transfers should reflect the size of populations, so that populous communities also have more resources available. Councils are also looking at their own funding sources. An important issue in this context is land management and revenues from property taxes. Yet, the role of this tax is part of the reason that rural communities lack resources while cities are relatively well funded. In the process of amalgamation, local government leaders thus warn not to overlook the sustainability of local communities. With bigger fiscal responsibility being assigned to the local level, the issue of control is also a recurring theme. Many officials pointed to the need for Ukraine to establish better accountability mechanisms and more transparency for local government budgets. An UNDP supported initiative that is publishing local budgets, as a form of open data, is an important step in this direction but substantially more remains to be done.

3.
Local governance policy and approaches

3.1 The centrality of local governance and decentralization to sustainable development

Marine Destrez @DesMarine · 2 Dec 2015
"We need to be realistic about how and when we will achieve the #SDG at the local level" Amita Gill #KyivDEC15

Source: Twitter

Effective local governance policies and reform are at the heart of UNDP's approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Amita Gill, Local Governance and Decentralization Specialist at UNDP, highlighted that, like politics, "all development is local." All SDGs are affected by local governance and depend on effective local service delivery. Decentralization processes however, require a power and responsibility shift from the central to the local level and a new equilibrium to be formed. If local governance and decentralization are to contribute to the sustainable development of communities and the well-being of citizens, the latter need to be at the centre of those very processes of decentralization.

UNDPUkraine @UNDPUkraine · 2 Dec 2015
#education provision is now local responsibility sharing experience Mikolay Herbst expert from #Poland #KyivDEC15

Mikolaj Herbst

Source: Twitter

Decentralisation touches upon various policy fields, which affects the implementation of many of the SDGs. One example is the field of education.[3] Mikolay Herbst, Professor of Economics at the University of Warsaw, gave some insights into Polish education reforms that included decentralisation elements. When reforming education finance, Poland gave a relatively large degree of autonomy to public schools themselves. In doing so, the administration set a good balance between autonomy and control by central authorities. Regulations and standards are formulated at the central level while 33 per cent of the education budget is decided at the local level. This balance forms the biggest success of Polish education reforms. As Herbst pointed out, it is the outcome of an inclusive reform process, rather than the result of a perfect design. It encouraged the cooperation of independent partners keeping the aim of good service (education) delivery in mind. In a way it introduced the school itself as another level of fiscal governance, and schools proved to be good managers of their own budgets and managed to improve education quality.

Conference participants discussed not only how to improve public service delivery, but also how to make local governance more inclusive and accountable, an ideal explicitly expressed by SDG 16, which aims to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels".

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3   Sustainable Development Goal 4 focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Several presenters stressed that reform processes need to make governance more participatory and involve citizens in decision-making processes. Goal 16 includes two key targets that are integrally linked to local governance and decentralization and have transformative potential to achieve all SDGs - develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels and ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

3.2 Integrated and interconnected local governance reform processes

A special focus throughout the conference was the reform of existing local governance systems, the challenge of decentralization and how such reforms should be approached and planned. A common mantra was the need to plan these reforms in an inclusive manner and consult local authorities and citizens early on. Different reform steps need to be planned so they can be passed and implemented in time and sequencing of these steps can be extremely important. Exchanges about such reforms can provide fruitful lessons learned, but it remains important to remember that reforms and their implementation need to be localized appropriately. While passing reforms can take only three years, their implementation in some cases can take more than ten.

adrian @aeionescu · 2 Dec 2015
Giosan, Peteri: need strong coordination unit for decentralization policy in central govt. President's office, Prime Minister's? #KyivDEC15

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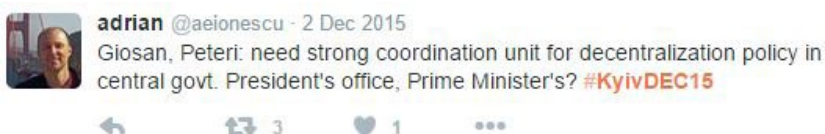
Source: Twitter

Victor Giosan, a decentralization policymaker from Romania, highlighted that decentralization reform is a twofold process: technocratic on the one hand, involving legal reforms and their implementation, and deliberative on the other hand. To facilitate this twofold approach, Giosan suggested the use of online platforms for citizen feedback and clear responsibility sharing across all levels of governance. Decentralization does not mean that central government should withdraw from certain policy fields. Rather it should keep the responsibility for developing common strategies and policies, setting standards and formulating an efficient regulatory framework. Subsidiarity, a key concept in this area, also means that responsibility in some situations might better stay at a higher level of governance. Central government has to make sure in particular, that minimum standards in relation to public service delivery are kept. Local governments, however, should be able to decide how social services are provided.

Ukrainian authorities recognized the problem of coordination in such a reform process, as Vyacheslav Negoda pointed out: local governance institutions cannot oversee their own re-

form. To ensure an efficient reform process, Ukraine founded 24 reform offices in different regions of the country, which are charged with supervising the implementation of reform packages. The country plans to finalize its reforms by 2017. It is on route to accomplish these plans, with many reforms already passed. However, decentralization in Ukraine requires constitutional changes that are currently on hold and are a pre-requisite for further reform steps. While authorities remain confident that reforms will eventually be passed, their proper implementation is likely to take a much longer time.
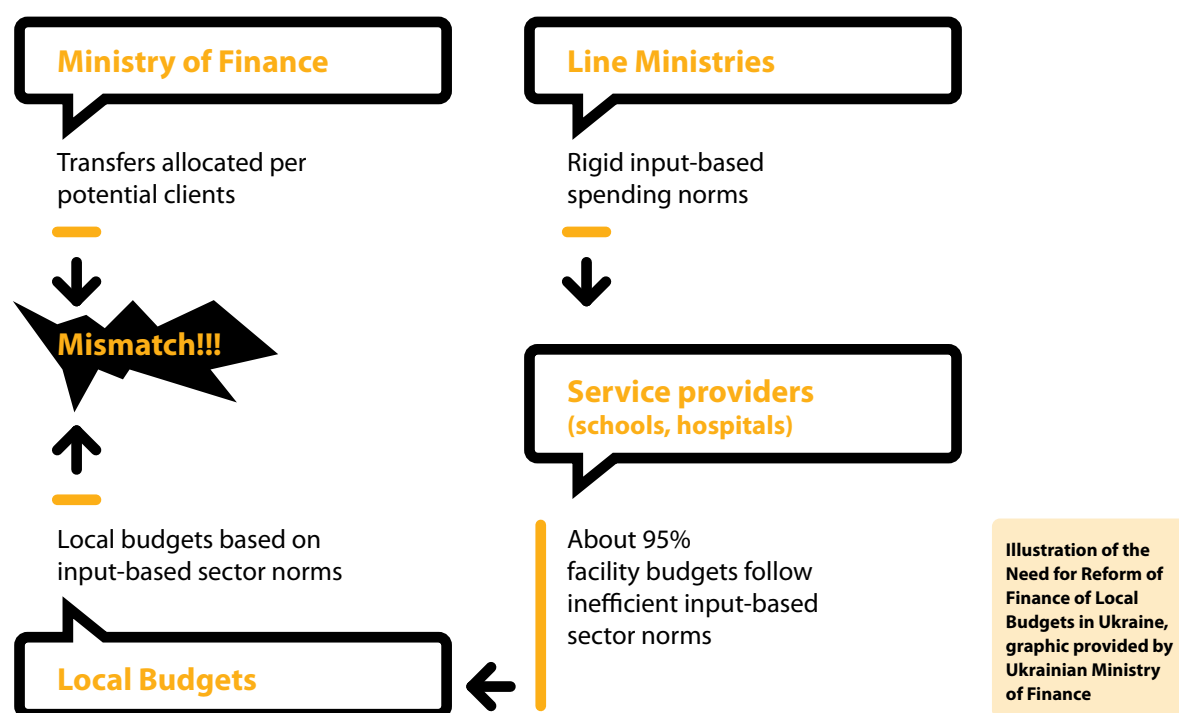
Reforming local governance institutions has a broad impact. Alexander Vornicu, representing the Moldovan State Chancellery, highlighted that the reforms that Moldova initiated in 2010 do not only touch upon the allocation of responsibilities and fiscal authority, but also on administrative and institutional capacity more generally. They include a look at land management and ways to foster public participation. In Moldova, central and local government representatives faced tremendous challenges in implementing the reform plan, which had been formulated as a national reform strategy in cooperation with non-governmental actors and decentralization working groups in each ministry. Over the planned five-year timeframe, only 15 per cent of reforms were implemented. Moldova struggled with financial resources and with political stability, as it saw five governments over this time period. The reform timeline is currently being reviewed with the help of UNDP in Moldova. The challenge is to take various individual reforms and parallel processes and connect them together. The Moldova example demonstrates the importance of sustaining political engagement and the reform process over the long-term for the delivery of results.

3.3 Fiscal decentralisation

Financial reform in the field of local governance remains particularly contentious. In many countries in the Europe and CIS region, governments have preferred to maintain a centralized control over fiscal responsibility. Local government units are thus mostly dependent on financial transfers. To truly strengthen local governance and to push for more effective local service delivery, fiscal decentralization might need to be a focal point for reform efforts in these places. The topic is, however, also highly politically sensitive. Few governments like to give up fiscal responsibility, as money comes with influence and as administrative jobs, another basis for the maintenance of power where there is an absence of meritocracy, are closely tied to the distribution of fiscal resources. Several representatives provided examples of how fiscal decentralization offers a particular challenge to decentralization reform efforts. Merely passing responsibility from the central to the local level is not always the answer to the question of financial sustainability of local government units. Different levels of governance should rather try to cooperate.

The situation of Georgia illustrates the need for financial reform in this context. In 2005, the country reformed its territorial-administrative system by transitioning from a four-level to a three-level administrative system through simply scraping the lowest level of governance and thus absorbing over 100 local authorities into 64 municipalities. While the country discarded an inefficient system of very small local government units, the indiscriminate reforms created disparities between different municipalities. The lack of financial reforms forced the national government to take over some government services from the local level, as not all municipalities were able to offer these in the new setup.

Fiscal decentralization is also recognized as a major challenge in Ukraine and its decentralization reform process. Focusing on ways to create increased government revenues, Ukraine has taken steps to increase tax collection and increase the capacity of local councils, which are often depending on property taxes. Ukraine also liberalised rules to allow for foreign lending by all 179 Ukrainian cities, with new local taxes serving as a source for repayment. In combination with higher borrowing limits, this should help local authorities to locate investments. In order to increase costs, financial incentives are supposed to stimulate a voluntary amalgamation of local government units and thus help to cut administrative costs at this level of government. Ukraine is also working on a mechanism of horizontal equalization in order to help those governments which are hardest hit by the transitional period, and is currently reviewing the funding rules in key sectors, which are subject to regulation by national ministries. This will have to be accompanied by new local fiscal oversight and external audits of local expenditures, as well as a mechanism for service quality assurance, both of which Ukraine is currently developing.

Ministry of Finance

Transfers allocated per
potential clients

Line Ministries

Rigid input-based
spending norms

Mismatch!!!

**Service providers
(schools, hospitals)**

Local budgets based on
input-based sector norms

About 95%
facility budgets follow
inefficient input-based
sector norms

**Illustration of the
Need for Reform of
Finance of Local
Budgets in Ukraine,
graphic provided by
Ukrainian Ministry
of Finance**

Local Budgets

While Ukraine is currently in the process of fiscal decentralization, other participants were able to share previous experiences. Natasha Ilijeva-Acevska, representative of the Networks of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe (NALAS) for instance, presented lessons learned from South Eastern Europe. In this region, fiscal reforms are still a work in progress. The composition of local government revenues varies, but mostly it is their own revenues that make between 30-40 per cent of all local revenues. As in many countries, property tax is a major source of local government revenue in the region of South East Europe. The yield of the tax varies strongly between countries and remains below the average of the European Union. These types of revenues (which also extend to land development fees and construction permits) are also strongly concentrated in capital cities, where the real-estate market is much stronger. One suggestion made by NALAS is to strengthen the importance of personal income tax at the local level, as local governments have some rate-setting power over it. Local governments need better capacities to prepare, plan and cost-out complex, multiyear investments in order to ensure effective service delivery.

Diana Toma, Senior Consultant at the Moldovan Ministry of Finance, presented the success and pitfalls of fiscal decentralization reform in Moldova, where policymakers created incentives to increase the revenue collection of local governments. Government transfers, which still make up an important part of local government revenues, are now partially based on the fiscal capacity of local authorities. Moreover, the national revenue sharing system was fixed to create stable income for local authorities. Budgets for education and social payments were thereby earmarked to ensure social service provision. As transfers depend on the local revenue base, they create an interest for local governments to improve it and work on revenue collection. These incentives were further increased as local governments were given greater autonomy in local government expenditure. In the first years following the reform, Moldova saw a steady increase of local government revenues and expenditures, a good sign of their success.

Consolidated local budget

Legend:
- Revenues, mln $
- Expenditures, mln $

Development of Local Goverernance Budgets in Moldova, graphic provided by Diana Toma
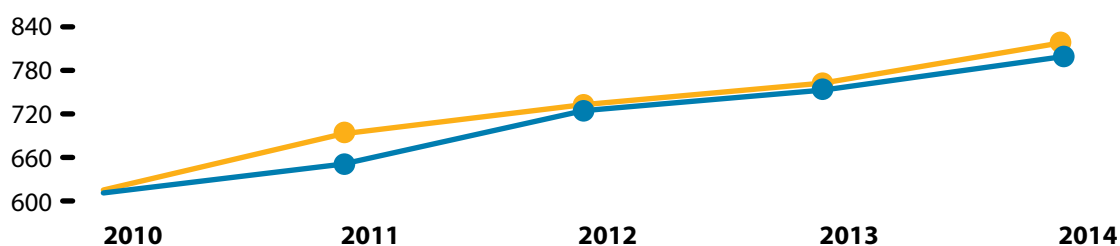
Predrag Jovanovic, the Director of the Serbian Public Procurement Office, highlighted that fiscal decentralization also strongly affects the field of procurement. He explained that the experiences from Serbia with regards to decentralization were rather negative. A strong focus was placed on the implementation of administrative procedures, leading to local self-government bodies becoming overburdened. He suggested combining the procurement of several local authorities. Procurement offices would in this way be able to create economies of scale in public procurement. This could lead to significant savings and more efficient procurement processes. A trial run by the office for centralized procurement and control in Belgrade showed very positive results. The key message from Serbia is that the centralisation of procurement can be an important step to assure successful decentralization.

4.
Responsive, transparent, and participatory public service delivery and local development

One of the central aims of local governance reforms is to ensure effective and efficient local service delivery. As such, reforms affect the most direct contact point between citizens and state institutions. Conference participants thus discussed different mechanisms and approaches to reach this aim, from finding sustainable territorial and administrative governance units to innovative ways to deliver local services. Experts and practitioners in particular focused on ways to make service delivery more responsive to citizens, sensitive to gender equality issues and free from corruption at the local level.

Public participation tends to be effective if it is built around some specific issue or activities, for example strategic planning of a community's socio-economic development, targeted for specific social groups. The same relates to the involvement of the business sector, which is not always easy to facilitate; but if the governments are responsive to the interests of the different groups, there are tangible results on increased participation.

4.1 Territorial and administrative reform

The essence of territorial and administrative reform is forming administrative units in a way that they not only guarantee local service delivery and inclusive governance, but are also financially sustainable. Ukraine is a striking example of the need for territorial and administrative reform: the country (prior to the ongoing territorial amalgamation) had 11,518 local government units, of which 92 per cent have less than 3000 residents. More than 70 per cent of these units are dependent on state budget transfers. To initiate a process to create more sustainable territorial and administrative units, the Ukrainian government introduced a law on voluntary amalgamation, a law on the cooperation of local communities and a

regulation regarding inter-village cooperation. So far the reforms have had some success. 793 local government units merged to 159 new units in 2015.

Conference participants were able to learn from experiences from countries that have already undertaken this kind of reform in recent years. They showed that the process is not only a mathematical problem of optimization, but also a question of political economy. Experts stressed the need for a carefully planned, inclusive reform process that takes into account the needs of local councils.

One example of successful territorial and administrative reforms is the case of Denmark. Hans B. Olsen, Senior Partner at DEGE Consult, presented this case by highlighting the need for reform Denmark faced, when reducing the number of local municipalities in two steps from 1,388 to 275 in 1970 and further to 98 in 2007.[4] Olsen stressed that Denmark did not initially have political consensus on the reform. Yet, many political actors saw Danish regional administration as being too dense. The private sector was worried about the tax burden of the public sector and many politicians wanted a clearer division of responsibilities between the state, regions and municipalities. Territorial units, government functions and financial allocations were reformed in the same process. Denmark relied on the voluntary amalgamation of government units with considerable political influence and pressure. Danish authorities made a constant effort to involve local councils in a dialogue on the process. They actively built consensus with local councils by creating clear and objective reform principles, while letting local government units decide on how to implement these. Financial transfers, for instance, were distributed in a way that funds followed government functions, in an attempt to avoid monetary disputes.

A more recent experience in the region is that of Albania. The Albanian process of territorial and administrative reform was concluded in September 2014 with the support of UNDP. It saw the number of local government units reduced from 373 to 61. Albania consolidated local councils in a non-voluntary, but all-inclusive process. All political actors, including local government units, associations, local communities, civil society actors and international partners, were consulted in the reform process.

New units were created based on functional zones taking into account the geographical realities. The new territorial organisation was mindful of the distances between centres and peripheries allowing for effective service delivery. Reformers also attached importance to territorial continuity, as well as cultural and traditional ties.

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4   Final reform steps were initiated in 2005 and completed in 2007.

In the case of the municipality of Korcë, seven surrounding local government units were amalgamated. The resulting ensemble is composed of urban, rural and mountainous areas creating a very diverse constituency. Sotiraq Filo, Mayor of the municipality of Korcë, described the pre-reform set-up as leading to high administrative costs, disparities between urban and rural areas, as well as weak local democracy. After the reform, Filo's administration introduced a system by which the municipal centre serves as a back office for one-stop-shops heavily dispersed within the municipality's constituency. This system cut the administrative costs by 20 per cent. The reform however, could not resolve the cost-intensive challenges of infrastructure and connectivity.

4.2 Inter-municipal cooperation and local economic development

An alternative approach to creating economies of scale in local service delivery is through mechanisms of inter-municipal cooperation (IMC). Across the Europe and CIS region, local governments have experience in joining forces with neighbouring government units to increase efficiency and effectiveness in local governance and service delivery. While not representing an alternative to decentralization reforms, IMC can provide a way to reform service delivery, independent from complex decentralization reforms. Even if introduced on a mandatory basis, IMC needs to involve municipal councillors at all stages. IMC projects need to be planned to be self-sustainable in the long run. They should not be seen as an alternative to territorial reform, but rather as a catalyst for further reforms. In this process, international organizations proved to be an important partner. UNDP, for instance, is actively supporting this cooperation between different municipalities and in doing so helps to foster local economic development.

At the Kyiv conference, examples of IMC were presented by Moldovan and Georgian representatives. In Moldova, 86 per cent of local government units have less than 5000 inhabitants, which leads to very high administration costs and poor services. Ghenadie Ivascenco, a local governance expert from Moldova, presented UNDP's effort to initiate pilot projects introducing IMC in ten clusters of municipalities in Moldova with the aim of improving local service provision. The clusters formed IMCs in a simple, easily managed, and cost-effective way by forming municipal enterprises to amalgamate service providers across municipalities. This closely monitored field experiment provided not only better local services, but also created ten case studies that can now be replicated in other parts of the country. Similar to Moldova, Georgia began reforming and modernizing different local government sectors by amending laws to facilitate IMC. A specific law on IMC provides financial incentives for inter-municipal cooperation. It is hoped that this will provide opportunities for better service provision, especially in the context of water supply, transport, infrastructure, health and education.

Emilia Gjerovska, Executive Director of the Centre for Development of the Pelagonija region, presented IMC experiences from the fYR of Macedonia. In order to stipulate this form of cooperation the government of the fYR of Macedonia passed a specific law in 2009 that provides incentives for IMC; 77.5 per cent of municipalities established some kind of inter-municipal cooperation. One example of this kind of cooperation was presented by the Pelagonija region, which founded an Integrated Regional Development Network (IRDN) bringing together nine municipalities to work together on economic development, social security and environmental protection. In an evaluation of the law, this approach was found to be successful, both in stipulating cooperation and by resulting in more efficient and effective service delivery.

Business Zones in Montenegro, graphic provided by Boris Rebic

A similar programme in Montenegro was presented by Boris Rebic, Head of Department for Investment in the Montenegrin Ministry of Economic Affairs. Together with UNDP, his ministry established business zones to foster local economic development. Five municipalities co-financed an inter-municipal business zone aimed at attracting new investments for the region. The managers of different business zones are jointly chosen by the municipalities and trained on management, the development of action plans, promotion strategies, infrastructure and other related topics. They were also taken on study trips, trained in creating promotional material and brought together with experts from other countries in a conference in October 2015. There is confidence that the business zone managers will be successful in attracting new investments to their regions, something that would not be easily possible without IMC.

4.3 Innovation in transparency, openness and public participation

Innovative ways to engage citizens and foster inclusive participation are a key demand of local governance practitioners and critical to fostering trust of people in governance. Initiatives were presented that attempt to increase awareness of participatory governance and build capacity of civil society actors for public participation. Local budgets can, for instance, be used to create financial incentives for CSOs to enter a bi-lateral dialogue on local governance. Such dialogue needs a feedback mechanism for local government to provide responses and show that they took action, as citizens do not only want to criticize local government. This creates incentives for civil society actors to become active and establishes trust between the two parties. Throughout the process, mechanisms to engage women particularly need to be established, to ensure that they are not excluded and marginalized.

Examples of ways to engage citizens were presented by several participants, with a special focus on Ukraine. Oleksiy Orlovski of the International Renaissance Foundation, outlined the general approach of the Ukrainian government to public participation. He highlighted that so far the issue had not been pushed enough and that creating ways for civil society to take part in local governance were too often ignored. To address this, the Ukrainian government adopted a national strategy for public participation for 2016-2020 to increase possibilities for participation, by, for instance, allowing participation in the form of a referendum. Nonetheless, currently only 18 per cent of territorial units in Ukraine have public hearings. The work of UNDP in Ukraine shows increased capacity of the local communities to engage in constructive dialogue with informed expectations. As another local example, Konstantyn Bryl presented the efforts of the Local Government Association in the Zaporizhzhya region in Ukraine where communities founded an association to attract investments and grants. It also aims at improving their financial and institutional capacity, including better citizen participation. The association holds frequent public consultations and round tables in order to reach decisions on, for instance, environmental issues. It also promotes the communities at the international level and wants to conduct audits of the investment potential of individual communities. Throughout its work, it promotes inter-municipal cooperation by establishing links between communities and by making links to communities in different countries.

Throughout public participation processes, gender-sensitivity is a crucial issue. Anastasia Divinskaya, representative of UNWOMEN in Ukraine, stressed that while laws and policies on gender equality are often adopted throughout the region, post-soviet countries commonly struggle to implement these. The on-going armed conflict in Ukraine makes this problem even more apparent. To tackle this, Divinskaya underlined the importance of gen-

der sensitive local service provision in areas like education and health. In these contexts, the participation of women is not only particularly important, but also relatively easy to achieve. UNWOMEN in Moldova, for instance, had good experiences in focusing on vulnerable groups when formulating local socio-economic strategies and developed a system to monitor these. The system involves 3-5 indicators enabling citizens to monitor their own community; simplicity and realistic targets are key. The focus on specific issues or societal groups in the context of participation can help involve those groups. It creates interest in participation processes, raising public awareness about mechanisms and procedures for participation.

E-governance tools can play a special role and take local governance directly to citizens. One of the tools used in Ukraine is based on the concept of *ambient accountability* at the local level. Together with municipalities, UNDP created ear shaped recorders, which were placed in public spaces to offer channels for effective citizen feedback on public services, and to enable authorities to quickly react to citizens' demands. Ukrainian authorities also developed the Open Budget Tool for municipalities. It is based on the concept of open data: municipalities upload their budget tables onto a platform, which then processes and presents them in user-friendly formats for citizens, also making budget data more understandable and usable for the authorities themselves. The data is then openly and freely accessible online. The tool opens up several possibilities and uses for budget data. It creates benchmarks and comparisons of budget spending between municipalities. It also enables accessibility of the budgetary calendar. In doing so, the open budget tool contributes to making the relationship between budgeting and expenditure procedures more transparent and accessible to citizens, and also strengthens the possibility of citizens holding authorities to account on the basis of their budget.

4.4 One-stop shops, civil society organizations and digital tools as alternative service delivery models

The increasing number of civic actors and digitization of the world provides opportunities to improve local service delivery. More and more countries are using e-governance services as an efficient way to get in touch with citizens and provide local governance services. One example of this was provided by representatives from Kyrgyzstan, where an on-going process of local self-government reform has been initiated by the central government. While it initially met resistance from local governments, they have progressively taken ownership of the reforms, as the benefits became visible. In the area of service provision, a basic registry of municipal public services was developed, out of which the 12 most in-demand services were identified (mainly concerning the expedition of official documents). This led to the

establishment of one-stop service provision centres at the local level, including digital solutions to the provision of documents within the centres. Here, citizens can receive these 12 basic services efficiently and free of charge, using e-governance tools. Grouping these services together and digitalizing them in one-stop centres has meant that citizens have to deal with less "red tape," local governance bodies have become more efficient and corruption has been reduced. It is thus already planned to expand the number of services provided from 12 to 15-16 in the near future.

Ukraine also recently gained experience in using e-governance for improved local service delivery. So far, the main interest of citizens with regards to digital solutions is to use new technologies to obtain information (what documents are necessary for certain procedures, the opening hours of a public office, etc.). Increasingly they are, however, introduced for service provision. The challenge is not only to prepare and build the capacity of local government officials to use e-tools, but also to push citizens to take full advantage of the possibilities for participation that such tools offer. Few people are willing, for instance, to spend time actively participating in local government processes through e-tools that enable, for instance, commenting on draft laws. Citizens need to understand the advantages of e-governance tools in order to build trust in them.

Since 2006, UNDP has partnered with municipalities in Ukraine to establish and develop e-solutions to local governance issues. One of the main tasks has been to gradually build the preconditions for these tools to function properly, including activities such as strengthening the capacity of local government officials to use digital tools. It also included introducing basic electronic solutions for the municipality, like a website for the local government or even supporting the transition to the use of electronic instead of paper documents. The programme also promoted the use of participatory budgeting and increased the participation of citizens in decision-making processes around service provision. A variety of e-solutions were introduced in different municipalities, including projects such as the development of diverse mobile applications to file citizen petitions on public services or to report corruption. ICT based tools and one-stop shops were established even before they were mandatory by law in all municipalities of the country. The code designs of the electronic solutions were developed in close collaboration with different CSOs. The project initiated by UNDP thus created a platform for dialogue between CSOs and local government authorities on how public services could be improved.

Another approach to improve local service delivery is the involvement of civic non-state actors in the process. Samir Omerefendić, a representative of UNDP Bosnia and Herzegovina, presented results of an EU-funded project focusing on the reinforcement of local democracy (LOD). It aims at building capacities of local CSOs to take a lead in providing local government

services in cooperation with local government units. Since 2009, the project was implemented in 50 municipalities and cities in four phases and supported over 220 CSOs across Bosnia and Herzegovina. The CSOs successfully implemented over 260 projects based on the needs in local communities. Beneficiaries of the grants were selected based on competitive criteria, looking particularly at organisations' willingness to change and to be more transparent. Local governments were incentivized to take an interest in the selection by a 10-20 per cent co-financing requirement that was also meant to make services sustainable.

The LOD methodology is flexible and transferable across regions and countries. Based on the EU grants scheme, it focuses on three main principles: transparency, involvement or inclusion, and universality. It seeks to increase CSO funding transparency and enhance quality, competition and efficiency of individual projects focusing on delivery of results. In this process, the project aims at building project management capacities of local government and CSOs. It also aims to encourage networking, partnerships and dialogue across different CSOs. Finally, the project is intended to improve cooperation between CSOs and local governments to help foster community development and prosperity. The methodology was primarily designed for larger local governments with complex institutional settings and greater administrative capacities. However, it was stressed that it is easily adaptable.

Asocijacija XY:
Dedicated to the Health of Citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina

One of the associations benefitting from the LOD project funding is the Asocijacija XY. Emina Osmanagić, representing the organisation, highlighted the demanding nature of the LOD methodology. The programme, while being demanding on CSOs, increased their organizational capacity and helped them to be recognized as a responsible and reliable partner for future cooperation with government institutions and donor organisations. To Osmanagić, the benefits were clear: the programme is implementing a community-comprehensive approach. As such, it ensures participation of different stakeholders and beneficiaries. It helps to develop tools needed by the local CSOs and increases advocacy capacities. In doing so, the programme was successful in supporting a long-term partnership between Associjacija XY and the local government and, crucially, enabled the organisation to provide healthcare to local citizens.

The LOD methodology can be used as a helpful management tool to achieve better organizational capacity and an effective mechanism to make service delivery through CSOs possible. It is, however, important that CSOs are involved in all phases of its implementation.

5.
Promoting integrity and anti-corruption measures at the local level

One of the highlights of the conference was the launch of the ACT project, a regional, local governance anti-corruption initiative funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania and implemented jointly by UNDP and the Partners for Local Development Foundation (FPLD), a Romanian non-governmental organization, in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

H.E. Cornel Ionescu, the Ambassador of Romania to Ukraine, welcomed the audience, reminding them of the timeliness and relevance of the initiative. Municipalities have been perceived as particularly vulnerable to corruption due to their tight networks of power as well as their central role in delivering basic services and licences. Yet, municipalities are also the primary interface between citizens and their elected representatives, and as such offer a great opportunity for trust-building and participatory approaches to decision-making that affects people's lives.

UNDPUkraine @UNDPUkraine · 3 Dec 2015
Remove monopoly, engage #civilsociety and private sector, reinvent institutions - recipe to fight #corruption MacLean Abaroa #KyivDEC15

  2   1

Source: Twitter

As noted by Ana Vasilache, Director of FPLD, this three-year project[5] proposes the implementation of a participative, innovative and practical anti-corruption methodology at the local level. The methodology is based on the growing body of literature depicting "islands of integrity", "positive deviance" or development "outliers." It takes as a departure point devel-

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5   The ACT project is a three year project currently in the second year of implementation; funding for the third year of implementation will depend on approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania.

opment, and in this case anti-corruption, success stories and to distil their lessons learnt into principles that can be replicated by anti-corruption champions around the world.

The specific methodology of the ACT project was inspired by the rare successful experience in reducing corruption of the former Mayor of La Paz, Ronald MacLean Abaroa and Prof. Robert Klitgaard, leading authorities on anti-corruption. Ana Vasilache worked with them to dissect the logical steps described in their landmark book on corruption at the local level, "Corrupt Cities". They identified key guiding principles. Firstly, corruption at the local level should be approached as a systemic, not a personal, issue. Secondly, in order to ensure ownership of the anti-corruption solutions, those solutions need to be identified and developed from the inside, yet external facilitation can play a great role to foster and maintain the momentum and creativity of anti-corruption efforts. Thirdly, transparency and openness can help turn civil society and the private sector into allies for efficiency and integrity, yet it's essential to ensure that the timing of their engagement is right and that the municipality feels empowered to take on anti-corruption efforts.

Developed by FPDL and enriched by UNDP's experience in the Europe and CIS region, this anti-corruption methodology has already been applied in more than 10 South-East European countries[6] by 20 local governments, and gained international recognition through a UN Public Service Award.[7]

Ronald MacLean Abaroa participated in the conference to personally greet the new cohort of practitioners and introduce the methodology's rationale to fellow mayors and other participants. He originally developed his approach to anti-corruption as the first elected Mayor of La Paz, where he saved the municipality from bankruptcy. He reminded the participants of the economic principle of corruption defined by Robert Klitgaard, "corruption is equal to monopoly and discretion power minus accountability." Based on his inspirational experience, he also shared three key lessons with the audience:

- "Corruption is a symptom, not the disease": at the heart of the project is the idea that institutions can limit the number of opportunities for corruption; "Take a Bolivian driver of a car, how he drives depends on whether he is in Germany or in Peru, not on his cultural roots";

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6   Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Kosovo, FYRO Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania. Serbia. References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

7   In 2011, the municipalities of Craiova, Romania and Martin, Slovakia applying this methodology, received a UN Public Service Award in the category of anti-corruption.

- Some individuals embody the culture of corruption in an institution, they will probably have to leave the institution in order not to undermine the municipalities' efforts towards reform. Yet most of the municipal staff are actually resources in the anti-corruption fight as they are the best placed to identify vulnerabilities;

- Breaking monopolies and increasing transparency can be done through simple ideas and actions, notably relying on citizens for monitoring progress and implementation. For example, opening the negotiations with unions to the general public in La Paz prevented union leaders from demanding kickbacks.

Ivana Puksec is one of the local governance practitioners who were trained to reproduce and apply the ACT methodology. She presented the results of her first collaborations with municipalities in Croatia, which included improved access to healthcare, innovative e-governance services and transparent procurement processes. She described how the participating municipalities in the Western Balkans were carrying on the identified tasks after the completion of the project thanks to ownership of the solutions by municipal employees. She noted that some of the implementing municipalities were now featured as examples for the new local governance reforms underway in Croatia.

Source: Twitter

6. Conclusion

Throughout the conference, a key theme was that improved local governance and innovative approaches to public service delivery are critical components of enhancing the development agenda in many countries and in Ukraine in particular. Ensuring local government efficiency and effectiveness is the most direct way to improve people's lives and to stimulate

economic growth. At the same time, an approach of "the more decentralization, the better" is too one-dimensional and should be avoided, as made evident by the example of procurement reform, for instance. As a whole, reforming local governance and innovating in service delivery are crucial to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

UNDPUkraine @UNDPUkraine · 2 Dec 2015
Success in reforms in #Ukraine will give green light for reforms in Georgia and post-Soviet countries #KyivDEC15

2   View photo   **Source: Twitter**

The circumstances of the countries and the local governance solutions utilized from across the Europe and CIS region proved to be diverse, as did the state of decentralization in the individual societies. Yet, many challenges were surprisingly similar across these different countries. The Kyiv conference inspired a productive exchange of best practices and experiences. It showed the need to better connect practitioners from different countries in the region in order to facilitate such exchanges in the future. Showcasing the reform processes and the projects that were implemented also highlighted the important support provided by international organisations, such as UNDP, which can serve as a catalyst for reform-minded stakeholders and help foster effective and efficient local governance.

One message that stood out from the different discussions is the need for transparent and inclusive reform processes. Decentralisation reforms can often be highly contested. A central coordination body and strategy is recommended. Throughout a reform process, all stakeholders need to be consulted as early as possible and get an opportunity to have their voices heard. Transparency and openness of the reform process are crucial in building political consensus for reforms and finding innovative solutions. It is important to understand that the efforts in decentralisation and support for local governance are aimed to improve peoples' lives, by creating stronger ties between citizens and the state.

Similarly, if well-conceived, well-executed and well-communicated, a reform of local governance and a decentralization process can help build trust of society in government and institutions. To do so, citizens need to be heard in the context of public service delivery and local decision-making by government. Effective accountability mechanisms must also be in place. Throughout the reforms and on a regular basis, local governments must offer mechanisms for public participation and ways to gather feedback from citizens and be responsive to their demands. This is the only way that people-centred public services can truly be achieved. In the context of reforms, the importance of dialogue was particularly stressed. Where local councils are concerned, they should be involved in planning processes as early as possible in order to take their opinions into account. This is not only likely to

lead to better results, but also pre-empt conflicts, especially in contested fields like fiscal decentralization.

The conference provided a clear outline of the institutional and conceptual framework for decentralization, and experiences of countries in the region dealing with fiscal decentralization, local taxation as well as government grants to support operations of local administrative units. Improving efficiency and effectiveness of municipalities by joining resources in achieving development aims, sharing expertise, improving service delivery and enhancing local economic development can be facilitated and operationalized through inter-municipal cooperation. At the same, this is not a substitute for territorial and administrative reform which is often essential, though difficult.

New technologies and innovations offer ways to make local governance and decentralization processes more inclusive as well as more efficient and less vulnerable to corruption. Citizens are increasingly educated and actively using ICTs and will therefore be increasingly demanding of their authorities. Governments must take advantage of the possibilities that technology opens up in order to meet these growing citizen demands. It is, however, important to ensure that the e-governance tools do not foster or increase social exclusion and that policy makers are not blind to the barriers that vulnerable groups, for instance, the elderly, the poor, IDPs, people living in conflict areas, or minorities, may face in the use of e-governance tools. Civil society organizations and the private sector can be the best partners for government in improving efficiency and responsiveness of local governance.

Making Decentralization Reform Work:

Opportunities and Innovations for Local Governance and Service Delivery

International Conference
2-3 December 2015, Kyiv, Ukraine

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