

# Session 1.2. Harmonisation and Alignment: Guiding Principles in Practice

## INTRODUCTION

The Paris Declaration and subsequent Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) are relevant for all stakeholders involved in the process of local governance and decentralisation. Effective support to domestically owned reform processes requires smart forms of alignment and harmonisation of support strategies, which are recognised in the general and specific guidelines of the DPWG-LGD for enhancing alignment and harmonisation.

Following up on the introduction, this interactive session explores how the guidelines are implemented in a variety of country contexts, the limitations encountered in the process, the lessons learned and emerging good practices, as well as the strategic and operational challenges ahead.

The focus of this session lies in the practice and related exchange of experiences on what works and what doesn't in different country contexts. The session consists of a multi-actor panel (four or five different voices), reflecting on the implementation of the guiding principles in practice and sharing their experiences interactively with the audience.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The session revolves around three main questions:

- Why is alignment and harmonisation so important in support of local governance and decentralisation?
- Why is it so difficult to apply alignment and harmonisation?
- What can we learn from practice and what are the main challenges ahead?

The Paris Declaration and AAA have stressed the importance of ownership for decentralisation and local governance (see also session 1.1). Decentralisation is a highly political process with many different actors at different levels and, to be successful, a long-term horizon is required. It is related to a huge reform agenda involving political, institutional, technical and cultural considerations for which a system approach is needed. Session 1.3 will go deeper into decentralisation as an open system. Donors should avoid fragmented, uncoordinated, incoherent approaches and make better use of cooperation and task division based on comparative advantages.

For example, possibilities for joint action include the following:

- regular donor meetings
- local working groups on local governance and decentralisation, appointing a lead partner (or troika) on rotation

- a roadmap at the country level that includes joint field missions for identification, monitoring, etc.
- joint financing mechanisms (basket funding, sector budget support, etc.)
- joint reviews in the case of budget support
- joint capacity-building programmes at the level of central/local government

However, in practice it often appears to be difficult to apply the principles of harmonisation and alignment. Besides the generic constraints of the overall aid system, there are constraints that relate specifically to the arena of local governance and decentralisation, such as the following:

- limited national ownership—or promoting local governance and decentralisation in “hostile” environments
- reliability of country systems
- the need for critical alignment
- the wide variety of possible lenses to provide support for local governance and decentralisation

Another complicating factor is that it is difficult to coordinate effectively with other support programmes such as general budget support, sector-wide approaches, civil society support programmes, etc.

Ssekakiryanga (2010), in his paper for the DPWG-LGD, describes the case of Uganda. Uganda has a relatively long tradition of decentralised government, which started with the resistance councils during and after the civil war in the 1980s. In the early 1990s, several donors were pioneering with support for local government, dividing their concentration in Uganda according to districts. Since then many new initiatives have been taken for alignment and harmonisation of donor support to decentralisation and local governance:

- A local government development fund was established and funded by several donors, providing non-sector-specific grants to the districts, which aligned them to the development process in the country.
- A decentralisation development partners group was formed, which facilitated a dialogue between donors, channelled donor support through basket funds and carried out a division-of-labour exercise.
- Donor cooperation was strengthened by the Joint Assistance Strategy developed in 2005, in which donor partners committed themselves to work more efficiently and to harmonise and align their efforts.
- A Joint Budget Support Framework was established in 2008 to manage budget support in order to improve the efficiency and quality of services through the involvement of local governments. It was accompanied by a Joint Assistance Framework to benchmark progress on agreed actions (including actions by the government).

## PANEL DISCUSSION

During the panel discussion, the following questions will be discussed:

1. **How to make it work in practice:** What concrete approaches, mechanisms and financial instruments have helped to ensure (critical) alignment and harmonisation?

2. **Looking beyond local governance and decentralisation:** How can linkages and harmonisation with other support programmes be ensured?
3. **Challenges ahead:** What are the main challenges for harmonisation and alignment in local governance and decentralisation to be further discussed during this course?

## KEY READINGS AND BACKGROUND MATERIAL

DPWG-LGD. 2007. Alignment Strategies for Decentralisation and Local Governance: A Review of Country Practices and Experiences. Final main report. DPWG-LGD, Bonn.

[www.dpwg-lgd.org/cms/upload/pdf/AlignmentStudy\\_MainReportFinal\\_Oct2007.pdf](http://www.dpwg-lgd.org/cms/upload/pdf/AlignmentStudy_MainReportFinal_Oct2007.pdf)

This review builds upon the results of the existing surveys and analytical work carried out by the informal DPWG-LGD. The context for the review was set by the Paris Declaration and the five main principles for enhancing aid effectiveness, which bear strong reference to the core issues for the specific field of support to decentralisation and local governance. Seven country case studies were developed (four in 2007: Benin, Nepal, Nicaragua and Tanzania; and three in 2010: DRC, Indonesia and Uganda) based on four key thematic issues that have been derived from preceding studies and the Paris Declaration.

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[www.dpwg-lgd.org/cms/upload/pdf/wg/Adopted\\_General\\_Guiding\\_Principles.pdf](http://www.dpwg-lgd.org/cms/upload/pdf/wg/Adopted_General_Guiding_Principles.pdf)

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DPWG-LGD. 2010. What can development partners do? Note for Session 9. Global Forum on Local Development, Kampala, October 4-6. DPWG-LGD, Bonn.

[www.uncdf.org/qfld/docs/session\\_9.pdf](http://www.uncdf.org/qfld/docs/session_9.pdf)

Note prepared by the DPWG-LGD for the session on “What can development partners do?” at the Global Forum on Local Development in Kampala, Uganda, to frame a discussion on how development partner assistance in support of decentralisation and local governance can become more effective and better aligned with official government policy and the activities of other development partners. The article points to the risk of harmonisation as an end in itself, which may reduce innovation and detract partners from engaging in riskier innovations. It also says that development partner support is often framed around technical and normative issues, with insufficient attention to political and institutional realities and national reform priorities. It criticises the fact that donors continue to work through separate implementation units or other parallel or semi-parallel mechanisms. Tradeoffs related to the political economy and capacity in the countries receiving assistance might limit the effectiveness of principle-based interventions and even undermine developmental impact. If, for example, development partners try to align themselves with the formal decentralisation framework where political/bureaucratic dynamics are at odds with official policy, aid effectiveness can be reduced. It is argued that in countries where bureaucratic

capacity is low, donors should not blindly embrace country systems any more than they should simply bypass them to achieve immediate results.

Ssewakiryanga, R., on behalf of the UNCDF-Uganda Office. 2010. Uganda Country Profile. Paper prepared for June 2010 meeting of the DPWG-LGD. DPWG-LGD, Bonn. Unpublished.

## **OTHER LITERATURE**

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[www.oecd.org/dataoecd/46/60/30395116.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/46/60/30395116.pdf)

DEGE Consult for DPWG-LGD. 2006. Survey on Support to Local Governance and Decentralisation. DPWG-LGD, Bonn.

<http://capacity4dev.eu/c4d-lib/document/survey-support-lg-and-decentralisation-2006>

DPWG-LGD. 2007. Alignment Strategies for Decentralisation and Local Governance: A Review of Country Practices and Experiences: Benin, Nepal, Nicaragua, Tanzania. DPWG-LGD, Bonn.

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Nicaragua: [www.dpwg-lgd.org/cms/upload/pdf/FinalDraftNicaragua-Sept2007.pdf](http://www.dpwg-lgd.org/cms/upload/pdf/FinalDraftNicaragua-Sept2007.pdf)

Tanzania: [www.dpwg-lgd.org/cms/upload/pdf/FinalReport\\_CaseStudy\\_TZ\\_Sept2007.pdf](http://www.dpwg-lgd.org/cms/upload/pdf/FinalReport_CaseStudy_TZ_Sept2007.pdf)

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information on the Sector Working Group available at: [www.aidharmonisation.org.al/?fq=mesi&gj=en&kid=66](http://www.aidharmonisation.org.al/?fq=mesi&gj=en&kid=66) )

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## **GUIDELINES AND HANDBOOKS**

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#### **OTHER INTERESTING MATERIAL SUGGESTED DURING THE SEMINAR**