



Interaction
international development
toolkit

Local Government and the MDGs

To achieve the Millennium Development Goals, local government - as the level of government closest to the people - must be involved.

Why is local government important?

In 2000 the British government signed up to the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aiming to end global poverty by 2015. This is a huge challenge and all stakeholders need to work together to achieve sustainable development and poverty reduction. The delivery of the MDGs will be measured by results at the local level.

Local government is at the front line of delivery of these international commitments. Local government has a democratic mandate to represent the communities that they serve; they are close to the community and work to ensure that services are planned to meet the needs of local people. For many people the council is the only face of government that they see and it has the most direct relevance to their daily lives.

What does local government deliver?

Local Democracy & Good Governance

Local democracy and good governance are central to ensure sustainable local development. A participatory and citizen-focused approach, where local people have a say in their governance and development is essential. This strengthens accountability, ensures that services are relevant to local needs, and strengthens community cohesion. The UK Government has formally committed to the Commonwealth Principles on Good Practice for Local Democracy and Good Governance.

Efficient & Sustainable Service Delivery

In many countries it is local government that has lead responsibility for providing the basic services that are essential to the delivery of the MDGs – it manages water supplies, collects and disposes of waste, plans and runs local primary health clinics, provides environmental protection and agricultural outreach services, and encourages and supports local enterprise. A study by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (*Improving Local Government: the Commonwealth vision, Dr Philip Amis, 2009*) identified the linkages between the MDGs and local government.

Box 1: the Role of Local Government in Delivering on the MDGs

MDG	Fire & Police	Solid Waste Mngt	Roads	Primary Education	Water & Sanitation	Primary Health	Public Health	Land Use Planning	Econ. Dvlpt
1 Poverty	■ ■	■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■		■ ■ *	■ ■ *
2 Primary Education			■	■ ■ ■	■	■		■	
3 Gender Equality	■ ■			■ ■			■ ■		
4 Child mortality		■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■	■	
5 Maternal health	■	■	■ ■	■	■ ■	■ ■ ■	■		
6 HIV/Aids malaria		■ ■		■	■ ■	■ ■ ■	■	■	
7 Slums & Water	■	■ ■	■ ■ ■	■	■ ■ ■	■	■ ■	■ ■ ■	■
8 Partnering									■

Key ■■■ Direct Provision ■■ Indirect Relationship ■ Some Relationship
 * In some cases LG through bad governance can influence this MDG negatively

What are the principal challenges for local government?

Local government in the developing world is facing **critical challenges of rapid urbanisation, economic volatility, and climate change**. Local government is increasingly being called on to play a convening role, drawing together partners who work at the local level to achieve community development and deliver services and infrastructural improvement. They are also critical in supporting community participation in local development processes. **Particular challenges** faced by local government in the developing world include **access to sanitation, environmental management, urban planning** and administration of local government such as **financial management** and **local democracy** processes.

Local government **requires the right capacity and capabilities** to enable it to carry out these critical roles. This was recognised at the Forum for Aid Effectiveness in Accra, 2008, where government donors and aid agencies committed to ensure developing country governments will “work more closely...with local authorities” and “identify areas where there is a need to strengthen the capacity to perform and deliver services at all levels”. Local government has the potential to play a central role in the delivery of the MDGs – and needs to do so. If its capacity is not strengthened, the delivery of the MDGS will be compromised.

It is essential therefore that **local government**, where it exists, is treated as **part of the solution towards meeting the MDGs**. Local government and central government offer complementary sets of skills and perspectives on development challenges. For effective change both must work together and with other stakeholders in the interests of development. The statutory role of local government should not be undermined or duplicated; rather a greater emphasis should be placed on building skills and capacity at the local level to achieve sustainable development in local communities.