Local Government: How does it fit into the Post 2015 MDG Agenda?

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Introduction

A complex process of global consultation is currently under way to discuss the shape of the MDGs Post 2015. The aim of this paper is to address the question of where Local Government (LG) should fit into this debate, as a modest contribution to the ongoing consultation process[1]. The paper is structured as follows: the first section describes in more detail the global consultation process on the Post 2015 agenda; the second describes how Local Government relates to the current MDGs; the third section explores how some of the consultation documents see the role of LG before considering what the role of LG could be in the new agenda. The final section speculates on more radical roles for LG, in terms of what we should be asking for, and suggests new roles for LG in partnerships with other civil society organizations in poverty reduction.

This is a policy paper rather than an academic one, and represents only the views of the author, and is not associated with official positions of the University of Birmingham or those of the CLGF Board.

The on-going MDG consultation process

The current MDGs are targets for 2015. There is now a complex process of consultation about what should replace the MDGs Post 2015. The current MDGs were approved unanimously by all UN member states on the 8th September 2000, followed by further negotiations on the exact formulation, agreed at a World Bank meeting in March 2001. The outcome was a division of labour between the Bretton Woods organizations, with the World Bank and IMF continuing to control production of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) and the UN driving the MDG Process (Hulme & Scott, 2010: 4-5).

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[1] This is an update of a paper presented at the Commonwealth Local Government Research Colloquium, Ugandan Management Institute, Kampala, Uganda, 13-14 May 2013

The MDGs as we know them were contained in a four page annex the, *Road Map Towards the Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration,* passed late in 2001. The process was led by Kofi Annan, and was a considerable personal achievement, reaching an almost unique level of global agreement and consensus. However what is striking about the process was the extent to which the low and middle income countries, the subjects of the targets, had very little input into the process. Goal 8, *Develop a Global Partnership for Development* was the only goal with a major input by developing countries on what the developed countries should do (Hulme and Scott, 2010: 5). Nevertheless, the MDGs were a global consensus on time-bound development targets and gained a level of *'sustained attention that is unprecedented for any UN development declaration'* (Hulme and Scott, 2010: 5).

The process of consultation on the Post 2015 agenda has two strands. First was a process led by all the UN agencies with an agreed a common position, led by the UN system task team on the Post 2015 UN Development Agenda. They produced a document, *Realising the Future we Want for All* as a report to the Secretary General (UN, 2012). This is an important document and represents the results of collective work and a position paper of all the UN agencies represented in the UN system[2]. The purpose of this report, as noted in its summary, *'is to serve as the first reference point for the broader consultations to take place'* (UN, 2012: ii).

Meanwhile a range of national and international consultation processes are on-going to provide inputs into the process, with the UNDP mandated to provide leadership. A special session of the general CLGF conference in Kampala (May 2013) was devoted to contributing to the process.

The second major document is entitled *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development.* The report, prepared by the 'High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post 2015 Development Agenda' (hereafter referred to as HLP, 2013), was published in May 2013. This document, without really acknowledging it, follows much of the groundwork of the UN reports and reworks some of their themes but, critically, identifies an indicative (or illustrative list) of twelve goals and 54 targets that provides a much clearer focus of the potential shape of the Post 2015 MDGs. This paper considers these and the role of LG in more detail later. It is likely that the goals and targets are the main concern of the November 2013 inter-governmental negotiation in New York, rather than more general development statements.

The end point of these processes is that sometime in late 2014 or early 2015 there will be a resolution submitted to the UN assembly with a view to creating and endorsing the MDGs mark 2 (sometimes

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[2] This paper is to a large extent stimulated by two events I attended in October 2012 the EADI meeting and the celebrations of 50 years at the ISS (Institute of Social Studies) Den Hague, and an *addenda* to the CLGF Board meeting. Prof Rob Voss discussed the UN process and the relevant documentation while at the CLGF meeting we were briefed by the UK official from the secretariat supporting the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons.

called the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs). A few points are clear at this stage − the intention is that support should be unanimous and, more explicitly, have the endorsement of China. Anything less would be seen as a failure.[3] This has obvious significance for the extent to which subjects such as democracy, accountability and human rights are included in either implicit or explicit formulations. The role of Local Government might perhaps be one of those no-go subjects.

The role of Local Government in the current MDGs[4]

In tackling the issue of urban poverty, local governments are the main agencies overseeing squatter upgrading and the provision of public health services. In addition, in the majority of local government systems, primary health and education are LG functions, i.e. LG is responsible for planning and siting of clinics and schools, and sometimes paying for teachers and medics. In most government systems water supply is also a LG function. This is both a political reality, and is also supported by economic theory as being the appropriate level of government to oversee these functions (Shah and Shah, 2006: 10). Recent research has clearly shown the importance of local accountability in the successful delivery of public services, and that it is easier to make these systems work at the local level (World Bank, 2004).

However, LG has potentially negative levers (eg: the police and 'public order' agencies) for 'bad governance'. The evidence shows that heavy-handed control can be very effective in destroying jobs, mainly in the informal sector. This is an important insight as in many circumstances it is much easier to destroy jobs than to create them (Amis, 2002). Thus it is important to ensure that local government has the capacity to govern effectively. While LG may not on its own generate economic development, but under weak governments, there is a strong chance that poor governance will inhibit growth.

The chart in Figure 1 illustrates linkages and relationships between the MDGs and LG functions. While LG is involved in direct provision to most MDGs it also has an indirect supporting role and/or some relationship with most MDGs. The provision of basic infrastructure including roads, police and fire service, solid waste management and land use planning are all important in such capacities.

It has recently been argued that many of the benefits that high income countries enjoy are the direct results of functioning Local Government. This is significant in terms of education, health, transport, land use planning and a range of welfare provisions (Satterthwaite *et al*, 2013). Furthermore the extensive responsibility and mandate of Local Government for delivering the MDGs is also well documented. However, while LG mandate is very significant, in many cases this is undermined by the lack of resources and capability that LG has in reality. The key point, discussed further below, is that

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[3] Comment UK, official working on the High Level Panel
[4] This section is updated from the Background Paper (Improving Local Government: the Commonwealth Vision) to the 2009 CLGF Conference in Freeport Grand Bahamas)

if LG is to play a central role in delivering the MDGs it needs the resources and capacity so to do. Thus strengthening LG is a pre-requisite to meeting the MDGs, rather like economic growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition to address poverty (Satterthwaite *et al*, 2013).

Figure 1 The role of Local Government in delivering the MDGs

MDG	Fire and Police	Solid Waste Mgt	Roads	Primary Education	Water Sanitation	Primary Health	Public Health	Land use planning	Economic Development
Poverty	■■	■	■■	■■	■■	■■		■■*	■■*
Primary Education			■	■■■	■	■		■	
Gender Equality	■■			■■			■■		
Child Mortality		■■	■■	■■	■■	■■■	■■	■	
Maternal Health	■	■	■■	■	■■	■■■	■		
HIV/Aids Malaria		■■		■	■■	■■■	■	■	
Slums and Water	■	■■	■■■	■	■■■	■	■■	■■■	■
Partnership									■

Key ■■■ Direct provision, ■■ Indirect provision, ■ Some relationship. *In some LGs, bad governance can influence MDGs

Trends strengthening Local Government

Since the original formulation of the MDGs in the early 2000s it is possible to suggest that there have been some significant changes that have made LG more, rather than less important. First has been the process of urbanisation which of necessity makes LG more important as the agency delivering the majority of urban services. It is now estimated that one in seven of the World's population lives in an informal settlement (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2013), and the increased emphasis on urban poverty as a development issue similarly makes LG more important.

Recent narratives taking a wider and more multi-disciplinary approach to poverty with the importance of ideas like entitlements, voice and power, are also significant new developments. In the question of lack of voice, most people do not distinguish between local and central government. Thus, in seeking to make government more responsive, local government is the most important candidate.

Many of the adaptation and mitigation strategies to address climate change − in terms of preparedness for extreme weather events, and increased emphasis on energy efficiency in strategies for housing or transport − are again primarily in the domain of LG. Finally the increase global movements campaigning for democracy and the recognition of diversity (and conflict prevention and peace-building) makes LG more important. In many cases the rebuilding of local government has led the way in cases of post-conflict reconstruction. In this context the importance of fragile states in the development discourse should be noted. Finally it should be also noted that it in most disasters, of whatever sort, it is usually LG that picks up the pieces and is a major player post-disaster response.

Realizing the Future We Want for All, and the HLP

This section first considers the UN document drafted in 2012, before examining the HLP report, and then suggesting areas for potentially greater involvement for LG. For ease of comparison on various electronic versions, the referencing lists paragraph numbers of the relevant sections rather than the page numbers.

The 2012 UN report, *Realizing the Future We Want for All,* begins by exploring performance of the current MDGs − not unsurprisingly for a UN report it generally reports that this has been favourable. The political and development importance of having a universal commitment to poverty is widely supported and noted. In addition the value of having limited but measurable goals and targets is also applauded for creating some political and policy momentum around their fulfilment (UN, 2012: paras 11-16). On the negative side, the report notes a range of subjects that the MDGs did not adequately address including productive employment, violence against women, social protection, inequality, social exclusion, biodiversity, persistent malnutrition, non-communicable diseases, malnutrition, reproductive health, complexities related to demographic dynamics, peace and security, governance, the rule of law and human rights (UN, 2012: para 19). Furthermore, as frequently highlighted, the MDG framework provides no comment on the 'means' to achieve the stated objective (UN, 2012: para 20). This was justified as allowing local strategies. From a LG perspective the most relevant worth noting is that 'who' should deliver the MDGs was also not discussed

The next section considers the lessons for Post 2015. Thus it suggest that the format of concrete goals, targets and indicators should be retained; that there should be more on the means to address targets and that flexibility is needed for targets at all levels: regional, national and sub national. Finally a new there is a new list of suggestions on areas which should be included such as: climate change; inequality; resilience to natural disasters; demographic dynamics [ageing population]; dealing with urban growth; peace and security; improving governance and state capabilities; and respecting human rights and cultural diversity (UN, 2012: paras 24-27).

What is clear from this and from subsequent discussions is that some sort of new MDG framework is intended. The debate is thus likely to be around the content, and the questions around 'how' (means) and 'who' (relevant institutions or agencies) to implement the agenda.

The document then notes the global trends, challenges and opportunities to which the Post 2015 agenda should respond − which include the earlier discussion concerning changes since the original MDGs, and the potential role of Local Government in development.

The report then begins to map out its vision. First, the vision is that it should be grounded in three fundamental principles: *human rights*; *equality* (including *gender equality*) and *sustainability* (UN,

2012: paras 57-64). The report then notes the core dimensions on which the strategy will be built: *inclusive social development; environmental sustainability; inclusive economic development;* and *peace and security*. These dimensions are likely to remain as central to the overall broad framework. Indeed the HLP has recast them as the following five themes namely: *leave no one behind; put sustainable development at the core; transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth; build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all*; and *forge a new global partnership*.

The text from the HLP is worth noting on the role of LG thus:

[LGs] form a vital bridge between national governments, communities and citizens and will have a critical role in new global partnership.

> *The Panel believes that one way to support the role of LG is by recognising that targets might be pursed differently at the sub-national level – for example, so that example urban poverty is not treated the same as rural poverty.*
>
> *Local authorities have a critical role in setting priorities, executing plans, monitoring results and engaging with local firms and communities. In many cases, it is hard for local authorities that deliver essential public services in health, education, policing, water and sanitation to reach all communities. Even if not directly delivering services, LGs often have a role in establishing the planning, regulatory and enabling environment – for business, energy supply, mass transit or building standards. They also have a central role in disaster and risk management – identifying risks, early warning and building resilience. LGs also have a role in helping slum-dwellers access better housing and jobs and are the source of the most successful programmes supporting the informal sector and micro-enterprises"* (HLP 2013:10-11).

As someone who has argued the case for the role of LG in the MDGs, this is the most positive statement that I have read in a high-level UN or other policy document. This may imply that the LG and/or urban lobby for the first time is getting serious traction. This is also acknowledged in a recent publication which broadly notes the invisibility of LG to almost all official/international/UN policy statements (Satterthwaite *et al*, 2013: 24-25).

The HLP has gone much further than the UN documents in explicitly acknowledging the important role of Local Government: despite this, it is the detail of the Post 2015 MDGs negotiations that may determine the role of LG, at this stage (November 2013) clearly an unknown issue. however the general lack of interest in LG remains. In this negotiation it is difficult to know what counts, especially as, in the majority of the task force papers that support the UN process, the existence of LG is almost completely invisible. Even when LG is included, it is assumed to be subsumed in overall national governance discussions, thus denying LG any independence or autonomy (Satterthwaite *et al*, 2013).

While the main UN report is broadly positive about the role of LG the HLP is more much more explicit on its importance, underlined by the desire to disaggregate indicators below national level. This is potentially very important, but its relevance may well depend on how the recommendation is implemented in practice. It is relatively easy to imagine some indicators of poverty or education disaggregated to urban and rural targets, but the aim is to go beyond this. The potential of the approach is dependent both on data availability, and the nature on sub-national units. There is an

enormous difference between setting targets for State in India,– often with populations in excess of 50 million − and for Districts in sub-Saharan Africa. The detail and modalities still need to be addressed.

Unfortunately the detail of how LG will fit in remains to be seen. It is hoped that the HLP still remains the key text and/or influence rather than reverting to the more normal policy prescriptions that ignore LG. Figure 2 below describes the potential role for LG in the illustrative goals suggested by the HLP.

Figure 2 Potential roles for Local Government within the new Framework

	Goal	Comment	Local Government role
1	End Poverty	Replaces and reworks MDG. Still the main overarching objective as in the original formulation.	All four targets are to be disaggregated. LG as argued has major role in reducing poverty
2	Empower Girls and Women and Achieve Gender Equality	Replaces and reworks MDG 3. Wider Gender objective than earlier	All four targets are to be disaggregated. LG again involved often with local administration and regulations and with work on violence.
3	Provide Quality and Education and Lifelong learning	Replaces and reworks MDG 2. This now goes beyond primary education to includes a quality measure rather than a quantity.	All four targets are to be disaggregated. LG important via its involvement in the education sector
4	Ensure Healthy Lives	Replaces and reworks MDG 4,5 and 6. The merging of three goals into a single goal suggests how dominant the health agenda was in the original formulation	All five targets are to be disaggregated. LG important via its involvement in the health sector and through public health actions.
5	Ensure Food Security and Good Nutrition	New Goal concerned with food security and nutrition indicators.	Two out of five targets are to be disaggregated. Indirect role for LG
6	Achieve Universal Access to Water and Sanitation	Welcome new goal on water and Sanitation. Evidence suggests that it is appropriate alongside a poverty approach as in quite a few cases they are not congruent.	Two out of four targets are to be disaggregated. The provision of water and sanitation facilities is a classic and very important LG function.
7	Secure Sustainable Energy	Very important new goal that to a large extent talks to the Climate change agenda	Two out of four targets are to be disaggregated. LG important in implementing the regulations in terms of energy efficiency
8	Create Jobs, Sustainable Livelihoods, and Equitable Growth	Major, problematic and ambitious goal that talks to the economic growth and employment agendas.	All four targets are to be disaggregated. LG can be important in facilitating economic growth –issue of also not limiting employment in the informal sector
9	Manage Natural Resource Assets Sustainably	Replaces and reworks MDG 7. Seeks to address the more general environmental concerns on sustainability and biodiversity	None of the five targets are to be disaggregated. Generally a national policy but LG often important in implementation.
10	Ensure Good Governance and Effective Institutions	New goal that talks to governance and implicitly democracy and human rights. Likely to be most controversial and contentious	Two out of five targets are to be disaggregated. LG important but may be subsumed under national concerns.
11	Ensure Stable and Peaceful Societies	New goal that implicitly is addressing the issues of conflict, diversity and fragile states.	Two out of four targets are to be disaggregated. LG can be important in supporting peace and stability
12	Create a Global Enabling Environment and Catalyse Long-term Finance	Replaces and reworks MDG 8. Seen as important in building a new partnership and an attempt to widen the original formulation to include, trade, finance and commitments to climate change.	None of the six targets are to be disaggregated

Source: Author

Fully 30 of the 54 targets – remembering that they are illustrative targets and are still subject to negotiation – are recommended to be disaggregated. Indeed this figure increases to 32 out of 54 where LG is potentially, involved if the two targets concerned with municipal waste and energy efficiency are added, which both have very strong LG connections. This represents approximately 60% of the potential future targets.

In the consultation process there are clearly dangers for the shape of the Post 2015 agenda which can be outlined as follows. First, perhaps the most dangerous and predictable tendency, will be an endless process of lobbing and consultation (NGOs, UN agencies and Governments) that will result in an overload of the agenda[5]. This is understandable as there are many good causes and aspects of poverty which could legitimately be included. The challenge − and it is not an easy one − is to make effective judgements over relative priorities. This will certainly be a more complex and political process than the top-down and elitist definition of the original formulation of the MDGs. However it could be argued that HLP has done well in 'only' replacing the eight original goals with a suggested twelve.

The second danger − which goes back to the question of 'how to meet the MDGs' − is that the framework will be too prescriptive. This is likely to be exacerbated by the need for an international consensus to agree the new framework. From my discussions, it would be considered a failure if a framework was not adopted, which effectively means that some sort of consensus must be achieved[6]. This of necessity must include China. There is a potential danger that the MDGs might follow the process of the OECD/DAC (Development Assistance Committee), which drew up impressive and clear aid rules that were enshrined in the Paris Declaration on aid alignment and harmonisation in 2005, but these were substantially watered down, both through the follow-up Accra Agenda in 2008, and the Busan Declaration of 2011. It appears that the desire to include the new donors especially China meant that the text was so general as to have become almost meaningless[7]. In some cases the text is contradictory especially on the role of tied aid. The result of the need for consensus − and the participation of China[8] − is that the principles have been brought down to the lowest common denominator. The inclusion of text on fragile states and on aid transparency is the only significant and notable achievements.

The other outcome from the Busan Declaration (2011), despite minimal agreement, has been an agreed process to continue the discussion on a range of subjects, a preferred option at international meetings and/or summits where a meaningful consensus cannot be achieved. This seems to be the route that the Climate Change discussions are taking after the failure at Copenhagen and subsequent meetings in Durban (2011). It is worth noting that the relationships between major actors is more strained than in 2000 when the original MDG framework was agreed as: the EU no longer represents such a coherent block; the US is now more engaged in development; there is a closer link between the security and development narratives; Russia is more assertive, and the BRICS are more important, in particular

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[5]I think this is inevitable even if one takes a very cynical view of this ongoing 'consultation' process, it will be problematic to limit the agendas that are included.
[6] See Footnote 2
[7] In teaching, the principles of Paris 2005 are very clear to explain, whereas Busan has much less clarity
[8] China was seen as so important that when they effectively walked out on the process the then UK Minster for International Development personally flew to China to urge them to reconsider!

China whose economy is now second only to the United States. There is also a new range of donors beyond the traditional OECD/DAC group.

Assuming that some framework can be agreed – which seems likely – despite the apparent enthusiasm for considering the 'means' or 'how' questions, these may well be either left out or so compromised as to be rendered effectively meaningless. Clearly these are some of the issues that will form the detail of on-going negotiations.

The final danger is that the Post 2015 framework remains, as with the current MDGs, too donor centric, and too focused on the process of international Aid. Recent work, including the latest European Development Report[9], is seeking to move beyond aid, to a much more nuanced discussion of North-South relationships, which includes discussion of Aid and Financing (money); Trade and Investment (goods) and finally Migration (people). This immediately leads on to discussions of EU subsidies and protection of agriculture, and access to labour markets via immigration policies, with the realisation that flows of remittances and private sector investment dwarf official development aid . If we want to end world poverty then surely it makes sense to include some of these issues? Yet, while there is some discussion on going 'beyond aid', I have seen very little on implementation, but it is not clear whether this is because of technical difficulty or the likely political difficulties of changing immigration and/or agricultural subsidies in the North.

Finally in the Post 2015 process, it is worth thinking about whether, strategically, it is more important for the LG lobby to take a stance about the role of LG with the main development agencies, or argue for something in the final framework. Given the complexity and political nature of this process, both are probably equally important.

Has the LG sector suffered from not being formally included in the original MDG formulation? Did its inclusion in the Accra Accord (2008) which gave it a more formal role, actually make any difference? The point I am making is that LG in almost all systems – unitary or federal is ultimately dependent upon its own national government policies and behaviour[10]. In the end, we much accept this reality of how LG fits into the picture.

So what is the Local Government (or CLGF) perspective?

A good starting point for developing a LG perspective on the Post 2015 agenda is a recent article on the urban sector by Satterthwaite and Mitlin (2013). In this polemical but persuasive paper they note the dramatic increase in urban poverty − it is now suggested that 1 out over every 7 people in the world now lives in an informal settlement. However, official statistics consistently fail to adjust for

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[9] Presentation by James Mackie at the recent October (2012) EADI meeting at ISS, Den Hague.
[10] This is why any MDG report with LG recommendations could be seen to undermine national sovereignty.

the greater expense of living in an urban area. The data on water supply and connections are at best questionable. Furthermore that the estimates of numbers living in slums are at best estimates especially given the lack of census in many countries. The health conditions in some informal settlements are not only worse than rural areas but even than national averages, as data from Nairobi and Kenya clearly shows. The conclusion is that growing urban poverty is one of the major problems facing the South, and moreover that it will undoubtedly increase in the future (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2013, 7-8).

The core of the authors' argument is the success of intermediate civil society organizations like Shack/Slum Dwellers International and other federations of homeless and landless people have been effective in reducing urban poverty. These are usually relatively modest interventions but are driven by the poor themselves but crucially   through positive coalition and alliances with local government. As they put it:

> *There is evidence of the effectiveness of such an alternative approach to poverty reduction [depend on] interventions that have worked with urban poor men and women, and supported their productive engagement with local governments* (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2013: 9).

Strength of this approach is that it allows for collective initiatives, and that many of the problems of slums and service delivery that the urban poor face are amenable to collective provision and solution. Many of the problems slum dwellers face are related to the environment, where there is a limit to which individual welfare solutions,– such as conditional cash transfers,– can succeed. Providing these collective solutions or supporting collective consumption has always been one, if not, the most critical functions that local government does in terms of service delivery (water and sanitation); transport (roads); storm water drains and solid waste disposal, and primary education and health. While there is some evidence that these integrated urban functions are under threat[11] they remain critical for the poor.

Finally in relation to urban poverty, we face an unusual and unique situation in the increase and scale of urban poverty. We know it is politically significant[12] (and is exacerbated by the potential lack of employment opportunities for young men − angry or otherwise); and we have the knowledge and funds to tackle the situation.

There is in this approach a wider, but important, central point in that if we want to make governments more accountable and/or give the poor greater voice then the vehicle for making this happen is LG. An core element of this argument is that LG, in partnership with civil society organisations, is the key to reducing urban poverty. If the challenge is to go 'beyond government' to address poverty, then LG becomes both a critical partner and a key intermediate agency. The challenge is to bridge the gap

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[11]See the arguments around the idea of 'fragmented urbanization', which suggest that one of the major mechanisms of supporting the welfare state, and positive interventions to benefit the poor by government, is being threatened by both privatization and the rise of gated and private sector urbanization. This argument has been advanced primarily from the experience of urban development in the North.

[12] The cities of the South are potentially the weakest link in the global capitalist system.

between formal donor agencies and those who can actually deliver (i.e.: civil society organizations) for the poor.

The Figure 3 includes suggestions from Satterthwaite and Mitlin (2013) on what the international agencies should consider to include or think about in terms of the MDGs.

Figure 3 Post MDGs and development assistance in the urbanising world

Eight points for development assistance agencies to consider

1. Don't just set targets be clear about how they can be meet and by whom
2. Go back to universal targets
3. Consider where finance is needed, available to whom and accountable to whom
4. Have indicators that actually match goals and targets
5. Support local processes to generate the data needed for setting priorities and benchmarks and monitoring progress
6. Encourage and support local governments and civil society organizations to develop their own goals and targets to recognize their roles and responsibilities with the Post 2015 development process
7. Avoid vague and ambiguous statements
8. What about Climate change?

Source: Satterthwaite and Mitlin (2013: 29-30)

We need to make a similar and more creative argument for the role of Local Government, rather than allowing LG to continue as the junior partner of national government.

On reflection it is surprisingly difficult to articulate what the LG sector really wants. At a minimum, as argued here and elsewhere, we want/need to be recognised and acknowledged for what we do. However apart from the ideas of sub-National targets, do we need a more explicit role for LG? Satterthwaite *et al* (2013: 24) suggest the following key elements should be included:

- The explicit recognition of [LG] as primary stakeholders

- Attention to LG capacity to deliver on their mandated responsibilities;

- Attention to the capacity of local citizens and civil society to hold their LG accountable

What seems to be emerging is the idea of a goal/target to strengthen LG. The problem is that there is no obvious parameter or indicator to measure LG. Thus for example UK LG is highly competent but relies almost exclusively on transfers from the centre; whereas there are many LGs in sub-Saharan Africa which may have high levels of autonomy – in finance and other spheres but are unable to provide their mandated functions. In this, discussion the legal system does not suffice. What we need is political will from the centre to support LG, an approach fraught with political pressures at the local, national, and international levels. Nevertheless such a commitment, with all its caveats, might be more

acceptable to the majority of countries than some of the HLP governance targets. These may, or may not, be some of the issues currently under negotiation at the UN.

Summary and conclusion: the devil is in the detail

Commenting on the Post 2015 agenda and process is very problematic as it is observing a process that is continually evolving and one where the procedures are opaque. At the moment (November 2013) the haggling is still taking place at intergovernmental groups at the UN. Nevertheless it seems likely that the Governance targets are potentially the most contested[13].

One political escape route that emerges is the suggestions that targets should be agreed for national level, but the way they are disaggregated and implemented to be decided at the national/local level. This would potentially allow some of the more contentious targets, such as the HLP's target 10c) *'increase public participation in political processes and civic engagement at all levels'* to be interpreted in terms that are acceptable to the relevant national governments. This target is the nearest one that talks to the question of LG capacity.

Finally the core argument − that a strong LG sector is a pre-requisite for meeting the Post 2015 MDGs seems difficult to progress. The key to pursuing this is a well-resourced and capable LG sector. To achieve this we need a commitment to support LG from National Governments. This is very difficult to operationalise, and could be argued to invade national sovereignty. Nevertheless, to empower LG to play a central role in the Post 2015 agenda, this is what we need. In conclusion from a LG perspective the situation now (November 2013) is more optimistic about the Post 2015 MDGs than at the Kampala Conference in May 2013. However there is still much to play for.

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[13] I have no "inside" knowledge - the findings are interpreted from governmental positions.

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