

Glossary Proposal

UCLG Decentralisation and Local Self-Government Committee

WORKING DOCUMENT – UNDER DISCUSSION

PRESENTATION

A fundamental task of the UCLG Decentralisation and Local Self-Government Committee is to contribute to the debates on decentralisation. It is therefore important to consider decentralisation as an instrument for improving citizen's life conditions and not as an aim in itself. Likewise, one of the principal prerequisites for translating decentralisation from the theory into the praxis is a good understanding of the concept.

Based on this idea, the Committee launches this glossary that presents the definition of some key concepts for the work of local governments and its partners, such as “decentralisation”, “local self-government”, “subsidiarity” or “local governance”. Without pretending to be exhaustive, these definitions have been elaborated by the Commission itself or selected from different reference documents and publications from international organisms and experts.

Being conscious of the difficulty to define these terms in a complete and consensuated way, with this first glossary proposal we would like to launch an open and constructive debate to move forward to a more concrete knowledge of what we understand by each of these terms, starting from the experiences of local governments and its partners. For the future development of this first glossary we very much welcome your contributions to the selected definitions as well as proposed new entries to the glossary. Please send your feed back at ths Committee Secretariat <dal.cglu@diba.cat>.

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DECENTRALISATION

Process of reorganization of the State that involves a gradual transfer of responsibilities originally concentrated in central government towards other spheres of government (federal states, regional, provincial governments or municipalities) accompanied by the necessary resources to fulfil such responsibilities. The principle behind these processes is the belief that decision making and implementation are more efficient if taken as closest to citizens as possible (subsidiarity principle).

“Decentralisation is thus characterized by the existence of locally elected authorities, distinct from the state's administrative authorities, and exercising, in the framework of the law, their own powers and responsibilities for which they have a degree of self-government, under the control of the state. As understood in this way, decentralization in its modern meaning is inseparable from the idea of local self-government and the democratic principle.”

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). 2008. *Decentralisation and Local Democracy in the world. First UCLG World Report*. Barcelona: UCLG

“Decentralisation refers to the restructuring or reorganization of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at the central, regional and local levels according to

the principle of subsidiarity, thus increasing the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance, while increasing the authority and capacities of sub-national levels.”

UNPD. 1999. *Decentralisation: A sampling of definitions.*

“A process involving the delegation of a range of powers, competences and resources from the central government to elected local (subnational) governments.”

European Charter on development cooperation in support of local governance, 2008

“Decentralization -- the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to intermediate and local governments or quasi-independent government organizations and/or the private sector -- is a complex multifaceted concept. [...] Successful decentralization is closely related to observing the design principles of: finance following [clear assignment of] functions; informed decision making; adherence to local priorities; and accountability.”

World Bank. Decentralization and Subnational Thematic Group. <http://go.worldbank.org/WM37RM8600>

“State reorganization process and gradual transfer of competences that were originally owned by the central state towards other territorial government spheres (federal states, regional, provincial or municipal governments).”

Conclusiones de la Conferencia Internacional sobre descentralización y fortalecimiento de los entes locales en Iberoamérica 2009. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)

“Process that reallocates resources from a higher, more central authority to a lower one. [...] It might involve either devolution –the delegation of responsibilities to subordinates- or regionalization –the division of areas of government into smaller regions. Decentralization generally tries to bring power and authority closer to the citizens it affects in order to promote efficient and democratic politics.”

BEVIR Mark. 2008. *Key Concepts in Governance.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

“Devolution by central (i.e. national) government of specific functions, with all of the administrative, political and economic attributes that these entail, to local (i.e. municipal) governments which are independent of the centre and sovereign within a legally delimited geographic and functional domain.”

FAGET Jean-Paul. 1997. *Decentralization and Local Government Performance.* Centre for Economic Performance and Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics

“Decentralization requires both *power transfers* and *accountable representation*. [...] Decentralization is not about the downsizing or dismantling of central government; rather, it calls for mutually supportive democratic central and local governance. [...] Decentralization is any act in which a central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy.”

RIBOT Jesse C. 2002. *Democratic Decentralization of Natural Resources: Institutionalizing Popular Participation.* Washington DC: World Resources Institute

“[...] process of strengthening local government systems through the transfer of political, administrative and financial powers from central government. Even where a municipality has been granted new financial resources and enhanced responsibilities, the delivery of basic services to its citizens will not necessarily improve. Decentralisation will always be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for improved governance.”

NICKSON Andrew. 2004. *The Role of International Cooperation in the Decentralisation Process in Low- and Middle-income Countries.* Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales y Estratégicos

LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Capacity placed in local governments to govern themselves within the framework of a range of assigned responsibilities. This capacity may be political (capacity to elect their own government bodies, to elaborate policies and to take decisions independently from other government spheres), financial (capacity to access resources and to dispose of them freely) or administrative (capacity for intern self-organization).

“Local self-government is a constituent element of decentralization. [...] It presupposes freedom of action and organization for the local authority in the context of the laws; this freedom may be more or less extensive but this does not affect the notion itself.”

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). 2008. *Decentralisation and local democracy in the world. First UCLG World Report*. Barcelona: UCLG.

“[...] the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population.”

Article 3 European Charter of Local Self-Government, 1985

“Local self-government denotes the right and the duty of local authorities to regulate and manage public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population. This right shall be exercised by individuals and representative bodies freely elected on a periodical basis by equal, universal suffrage, and their chief executives shall be so elected or shall be appointed with the participation of the elected body.”

Article 2 World Charter on Local Self-Government, 1993

“Local self-government is a general principle that regulates the organization of the state and therefore, as a guiding principle of the territorial structure, has a significant efficiency. [...] it entails the recognition of an own and autonomous capacity for managing the correspondent interests, as well as the democratic and representative character of their organisms and the sufficiency and autonomy of their Treasury.”

SALVADOR CRESPO, M. Teresa. 2008. *La autonomía municipal en América Latina: una aproximación general en “Análisis de los procesos de descentralización en América Latina: balance y perspectivas”*. Granada: Unión Iberoamericana de Municipalistas

“Definition of local autonomy will then be premised upon a translation between individual powers and institutional powers. [...] we can identify two primary principles of local autonomy: the power of initiation and the power of immunity. [...] The former refers to the power of local governments to regulate and legislate in their own interests. The second principle refers to the immunity of local governments from the authority of higher tiers of the state.”

CLARK, Gordon L. 1984. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol.74, No.2, pp.195-208. Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

SUBSIDIARITY PRINCIPLE

Principle by which decisions have to be taken at the government sphere that is closest to the citizens, always within the responsibility assigned framework where the efficiency of these decisions is guaranteed.

“The principle of subsidiarity constitutes the rationale underlying to the process of decentralization. According to that principle, public responsibilities should be exercised by those elected authorities, who are closest to the citizens.”

UN-Habitat. 2007. *UN-Habitat Guidelines on Decentralisation and Strengthening of Local Self-government*

“In areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Community shall take action, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community.”

Article 3 B Treaty European Union

“The general aim of the principle of subsidiarity is to guarantee a degree of independence for a lower authority in relation to a higher body or for a local authority in respect of a central authority. It therefore involves the sharing of powers between several levels of authority, a principle which forms the institutional basis for federal States.”

European Parliament Fact Sheets, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/1_2_2_en.htm

“Based on this principle, functions (or tasks) are transferred towards an institutional or social lower level that is capable (or potentially capable) to complete them.”

UNDP. 2004. *Decentralised Governance for Development: a Combined Practice Note on Decentralisation, Local Governance and Urban/Rural Development*.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Local government ability to respond to different challenges and needs through the elaboration of policies in agreement with institutional and stakeholders networks. It involves that local government interconnects with strategic stakeholders for collective decision-making and the resolution of conflicts in accordance with a given system of procedures and rules.

“Local governance comprises a set of institutions, mechanisms and processes, through which citizens and their groups can articulate their interests and needs, mediate their differences and exercise their rights and obligations at the local level.”

UNDP. 2004. *Decentralised Governance for Development: A Combined Practice Note on Decentralisation, Local Governance and Urban/Rural Development*

“Decision-making and implementation process of public policy that, around local governments (elected in contexts of decentralisation), encourages an equal participation of all stakeholders of a territory (State, citizen civil society, private sector), reinforces accountability towards citizens and responsiveness to social demands in seeking for the general interest.”

European Charter on development cooperation in support of local governance, 2008

“Local Governance is about power and authority and how a region, municipality or community manages its affairs. Local governance is about citizens and institutions, and their relationships with the state at the regional, municipal and community level. Local democratic governance is a process of inclusive decision-making on matters of local / municipal / decentralised development and a participatory approach towards the preparation, implementation and management of development plans.”

CEMR, June 2008: *Towards an EU approach to democratic local governance, decentralisation and territorial development. “Response of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) to the European Commission's issues paper”.*

“Local governability is understood as the institutional system (set of organizational and procedural measures) for managing the local public affairs.”

ROMEO L. 2002. *Local Governance Approach to social reintegration and economic recovery in post-conflict countries: towards a definition and a rationale*. UNCDF

“Local governance can be defined as follows: A process of decision making (by local council and relevant stakeholder groups) on matters of local/municipal development and the implementation and management of development plans and the provision of basic services through allocation of available resources in order to achieve agreed development goals and targets. In essence, local governance is about: a) who is participating in decision making, how is this process organised, and to what extent are actual decisions reflecting the community’s priority needs; b) once decisions have been made, how are they translated into action and who is involved in the implementation process; c) what resources (natural, human, material, financial) are available and how are they allocated to meet people’s needs in terms of basic services and participatory development.

EUROPEAN UNION, *Towards an EU approach to democratic local governance, decentralisation and territorial development*. Background Paper Project No. 2007/147439 - Version 1.