Local Government Associations: Capacity building through exchange of good practices and peer-to-peer learning

Connective Cities Dialogue Event

9 – 11 July 2018 in Cologne, Germany

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Disclaimer

Introduction

Local Government Associations (LGA) are crucial to sustainable urban development as they support their members, local governments, in making their voice heard at the national level. Furthermore they help with creating an adequate policy environment in their countries and within international processes, provide information and foster exchange and networking among their members. The New Urban Agenda internationally recognises this important contribution of LGAs by defining them as "promoters and providers of capacity development". This pivotal as well as multiplicator role makes LGAs special partners for Connective Cities.

Connective Cities is a community of practice for urban practitioners worldwide. Through this platform more than 1400 participants from 200 municipalities have participated in more than 70 international exchange events and thus strengthened their capacities to face challenges for sustainable urban development.

Connective Cities is a cooperation project bringing together three partners: the German Association of Cities, GIZ and the Service Agency Communities in One World of Engagement Global. Having a Local Government Association such as the German Association of Cities at the heart of the project is one of the key components and strengths of Connective Cities, allowing a direct access to German municipal know-how and its network of experts.

In this sense Local Government Associations play a key role in the Connective Cities' approach to inform, mobilise and bring urban practitioners together.

Connective Cities cooperates with other local governments' networks too, as they share the goal of promoting sustainable urban development. For example, a memorandum of understanding with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and a close cooperation with Platforma, a European coalition of local and regional governments and their associations, ensure special linkages at European as well as at the international level.

Connective Cities recognises the essential role of Local Government Associations for worldwide peer-to-peer learning and intends to systematically include them in the activities of the platform. That is why Connective Cities organised this dialogue event for Local Government Associations, the first one of its kind. The goal of the event was to show that LGAs can learn a lot from each other, as they often face similar challenges in their daily work. With this in mind, we hope that this event serves as a starting point for a long-term dialogue among Local Government Associations within the Connective Cities platform.

Sabine Drees,
Benjamin Jeromin

25 participants representing 11 local government associations met in Cologne.

Concept and methodology of the event

Background

Today, most of the world's population lives in cities. The responsibilities of urban centres for achieving sustainable development grow steadily and so does their need to count on an effective representation of their interests at the national level.

In this context, Local Government Associations worldwide are taking on a crucial role in supporting their members, the local governments. **They articulate local governments' interests, apply pressure at the national level to create suitable frame conditions, provide information and support the capacity building of their members.**

At the same time, LGAs face their own challenges, such as being heard and taken into account by national governments, generating expertise about complex issues, ensuring sufficient funding for their activities, organising the internal decision-making process with their members or defining legal instruments that give them a voice in the legislation process.

Ms Drees welcomes the international participants at the Association of German Cities' headquarters

Cologne's Vice-Mayor Mr Wolter received the LGA representatives and offered the perspective of a member city.

The Connective Cities dialogue event

Despite significant differences concerning their structures, legal roles and experience, Local Government Associations often face similar challenges. Many of them have developed innovative and effective solutions for these challenges, but too often these solutions remain unknown to other LGAs which could benefit from them.

Based on this consideration, Connective Cities, upon the initiative of the German Association of Cities, convened the workshop "Local Government Associations: Capacity building through exchange of good practices and peer-to-peer learning", as a forum for exchange of good practices, peer-to-peer advice on concrete challenges and the development of project ideas.

The goal of the event was to strengthen the LGA's three main functions: representing the cities' interests, informing and advising their members, and supporting the exchange of experience and know-how between them.

The event was geared towards practitioners, experts and decision-makers from the staff of Local Government Associations both in Germany and at the international level. The workshop was designed as a dialogue event, which means that participants took an active role, presenting good practices, giving and receiving advice on concrete challenges based on a peer-to-peer-approach and developing project ideas that support capacity building within the participating LGAs. The event took place from 9th to 11th of July 2018 at the headquarters of the German Association of Cities in Cologne, Germany.

Participants

Association of German Cities Deutscher Städtetag DST	National Association of Municipalities of Mozambique ANAMM
Association of Local Authorities of Tanzania ALAT	Platforma Belgium
Association of Peruvian municipalities Asociación de Municipalidades del Perú AMPE	South African Local Government Association SALGA
Austrian Association of Cities and Towns AACT	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities SCTM, Serbia
Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova CALM	United Cities of Lebanon / Bureau Technique des Villes Libanaises BTVL
National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana NALAG	

Ms El Tannir from United Cities/BTVL Lebanon shares the results of a peer-to-peer sessions on "How to assess an LGA's impact?"

Thematic working groups

Group 1: Structure, processes and financing of LGAs

CALM | Moldova
Representation of LGAs interests and influence on politicians – holistic approach
Integral unity of three elements - institutional building, dialogue with national government and international advocacy - determines and generates the strength of the association.

NALAG | Ghana
Internal reforms for a stronger association
Through a long-term process aiming at organisational independence from central government, the association has built a good reputation both nationally and internationally and now takes part in the design of decentralisation reforms.

DST | Germany
Ensuring political and financial independence of the Association of German Cities
The DST applies different mechanisms to make sure it maintains its independence both on a financial and political level.

Group 2: Representation of local government interests and influence on law-making

United Cities / BTVL | Lebanon
The National Program of Support to Lebanese Municipalities
United Cities takes part in a central government's programme geared towards capacity building on the local level, thus helping to strengthen the Lebanese municipal institution.

SALGA | South Africa
SALGA's representation role in intergovernmental relations
SALGA is a recognized partner by national and provincial governments and to be consulted on all matters that materially affect local government's functions.

DST | Germany
Sustainable funding for public traffic
The DST successfully partnered with other institutions and applied a long-term approach to advocate for efficient and stable state funding for public transport.

The presentation of poster-printed good practices helps practitioners to learn about successful approaches and to engage in an open discussion.

Group 3: Thematic members' committees and working groups

SCTM | Serbia
Establishment and function of SCTM Networks
SCTM organizes and facilitates 24 thematic expert networks, bringing together local representatives around specific topics. This mechanism both provides and collects information regarding new legislation and policies to and from the local level.

DST | Germany
Financing local expenditures for refugees
Due to rising numbers of refugees arriving in Germany, a new structure for financing local expenditures for refugee care had to be established. On this complex issue, the DST formulated a technically sound and publically accepted position that reflects the cities' interests.

AMPE | Peru
Programme of Incentives for the Improvement of Municipal Management
Thanks to the support of AMPE in the design of a Central government's programme which incentivises certain local policies, it reflected the needs and interests of the local governments.

Group 4: Membership services for training and exchange of municipal know-how

ALAT | Tanzania
Mayors Award Scheme
ALAT created this mechanism to appreciate the outstanding performances of mayors. It is not only a public recognition and incentive, but also disseminates best practices and builds capacities in the local governments where they are most needed.

ANAMM | Mozambique
Strengthening the capacities of municipal assemblies through peer learning
Municipal assemblies' members (councillors) benefitted from training sessions facilitated by other skilled councillors. This multiplication scheme allowed for a broad learning process at comparatively low cost.

AACT | Austria
Development of multiple online tools for cities in order to meet the new data protection standards
The EU General Data Protection Regulation entered into force in May 2018 and raised wide-ranging new responsibilities for local authorities in Austria. The AACT started an initiative to support its members with guidelines and tools for a better implementation of the new regulation.
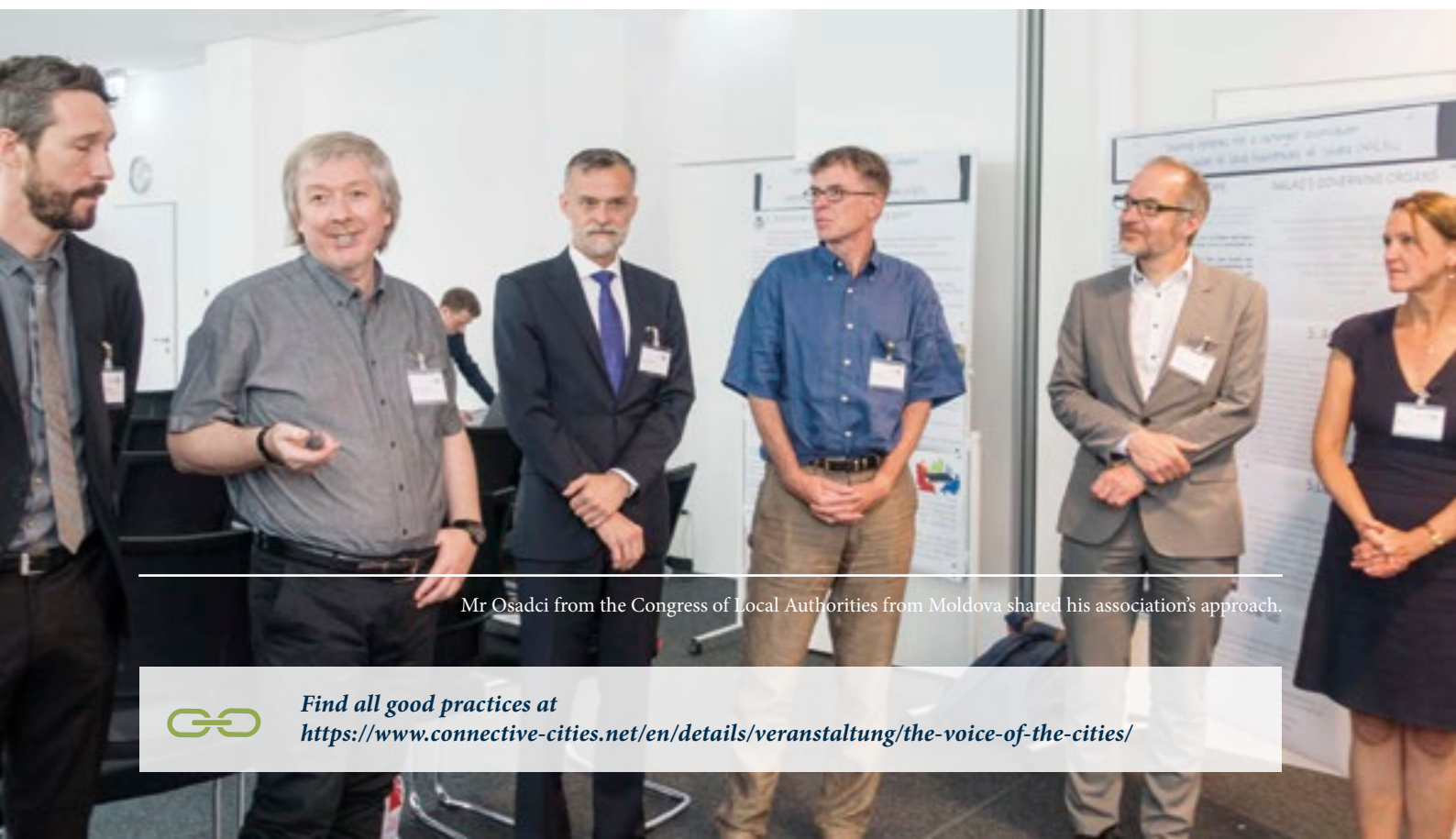
Mr Osadci from the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova shared his association's approach.

Find all good practices at
https://www.connective-cities.net/en/details/veranstaltung/the-voice-of-the-cities/

Key findings

The discussions involved a long list of aspects of the internal organisation of LGAs, meant to identify similarities and differences and share practical approaches. Some of these findings are highlighted in the following overview.

In working groups, the participants shared good practices and exchanged advice on concrete challenges their local government associations face.

Independence and relationship to central government

The capacity of effective representation depends on the LGA's relationship with the central government. On one hand, the LGA needs to be independent from the central government and party-political interests, assume a leadership role and make sure that all members, independently from their political affiliation, are being taken into account. On the other hand, direct and healthy contacts with the central government may help to influence decisions, especially where there are no formal, legally-binding mechanisms for participation.

All participating LGAs concur that independence, especially from the central government, is a prerequisite for effective representation of local governments' interests. On a practical level, the interpretation of this role varies from strict autonomy to pragmatic cooperation. Some, such as the Peruvian association or the Lebanese *Cités Unies* support central government's programmes geared towards municipalities. By participating in the design and/or the implementation of these programmes, they make sure that they reflect the needs of local governments. NALAG (Ghana) sees itself as a trainer and mediator when governance conflicts within the municipalities occur.

> **Effective representation requires a certain degree of independence**

The German Association of Cities defines independence in a very strict sense. This means for example that they decline to accept tax money from the central government or to be part of public policy initiatives. The reasons why the DST is so categorical on its independence are two-fold: first, the historical experience of the Third Reich, when the national government merged local governments' representation into a party-controlled, unitary institution; secondly, the constitutional right to local self-government, which bans national influence from local administration.
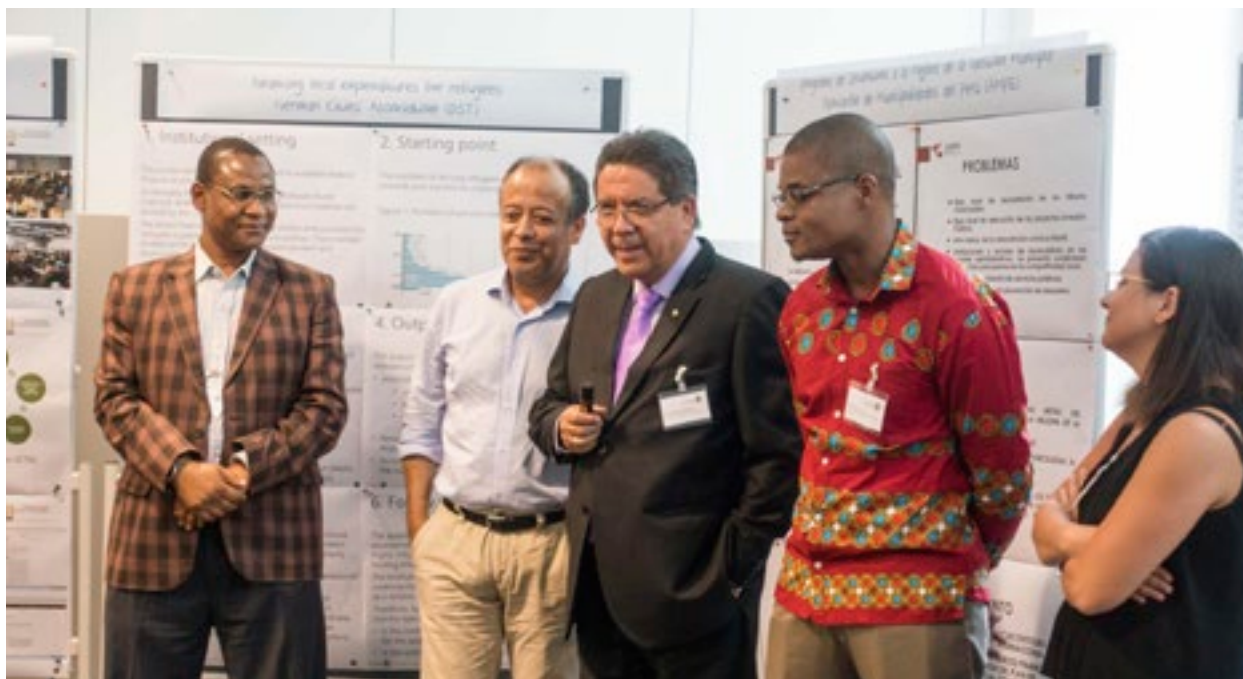
The Association of Peruvian municipalities was represented by its technical secretary, Mr Vilela Seminario.

Party politics

All LGAs seek to be independent from party politics, however, no matter how they do, there will always be party-political influence on their associations.

There are two effective ways to deal with it: first, the LGAs should strictly focus on the local governments' concerns and logic. Mayors, who are often directly elected, have a significant degree of independence from national political parties; secondly, they should make sure to organise their work in a thematic or regional way, not according to political groups.

In some cases, formal mechanisms or informal conventions can help to reduce the influence of party politics within an association. This is the case in some formal and informal conventions in the German Association of Cities. For example, the president's party affiliation alternates between the two main parties after every mandate, and decisions are made by a ¾ majority, which means that a cross-party consensus has to be found. In times of a changing party system, this is a challenge, and it also means that sometimes, it is not possible to reach a common position.

> **There will always be party-political influence – the question is, how to keep it under control.**

Mr Tonhauser gave an insight into Platforma's approach to capacity building.

Lobbying and representation of local interests

This is the core activity and the raison d'être of an LGA. LGAs usually seek an active role in influencing legislation in favour of local governments. The procedures and mechanisms for lobbying and advocacy may include formalised, legally-binding mechanisms, such as hearings or participation in cabinet sessions or in parliament, and informal procedures, such as direct contact to decision-makers in the government sphere.

In Moldova, when the CALM association started from scratch only 8 years ago, they found they could best represent the municipalities' interests by working closely with the national government, which needed support in implementing national policies at the local level, but also information from the local level (bottom-up information). Today, CALM takes part not only in inter-ministerial or ministerial working groups, but even has a guest status at the national government's cabinet table. Others, such as Cités Unies, exert influence through governmental programmes (see above) or via mechanisms such as the Mayors Committee, which convenes every 3 months and can deliver recommendations to the central government.

Another possible form of representation of local interests at the national level is the institutionalised participation in national legislative bodies, such as in South Africa, where SALGA holds 10 seats with hearing and speaking rights, but no voting rights in the upper house of parliament, the National Council of Provinces.

In Germany, all kinds of lobby groups battle for access to decision-makers. However, the German Association of Cities does not represent a special or particular interest, but the local government level. The practical examples (on funding for mobility infrastructure and on public expenses for refugees) presented at the event showed how the DST puts this into practice: by creating technically sound, well-substantiated, cross-party positions, thinking ahead and adopting a long term approach. When possible, alliances with other stakeholders with similar interests help to gain the opinion leadership in the public discussion and setting the agenda.
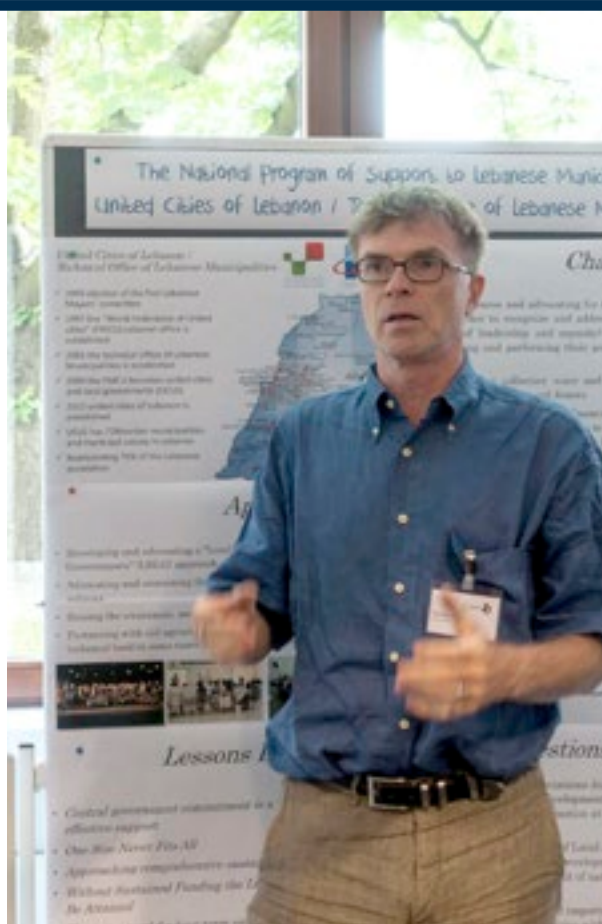
Mr Kiel shared his experience on advocacy for sustainable mobility infrastructure with the Association of German Cities.

A formal participation in national legislative processes is desirable – but LGAs have many other ways to represent their members' interests.

Structure

Most of the LGAs have a political structure, which takes the decisions, and an administrative-technical structure, which prepares them. While in countries with a strong and autonomous local level, the LGAs are mostly ruled by private law, in other cases it is public law that rules their status. In Latin America and Africa, roughly half of the LGAs seem to be governmental, and the other half private institutions (NGOs / foundations), according to the study "Local and regional government associations in EU partner countries" of Platforma.

The size of an LGA does not only depend on the availability of financial resources – it mainly depends on the functions that the members expect an LGA to take on. At the dialogue event, the size of participating LGAs ranged from 8 staff members to 460, making SALGA (South Africa) the biggest participating organisation. Specifically in SALGA's case, a closer look at its complex organisational structure with decentralised offices and 9 provincial LGAs, and its intense event schedule paired with their broad service portfolio quickly shows that this manpower is well-needed.

The structure and internal organisation of an LGA depends on a variety of factors such as the historical background of the LGA's founding, local governments' relationship with central government, or practical factors such as the availability of resources and staff.

The structure of an LGA reflects its portfolio and the national political system.
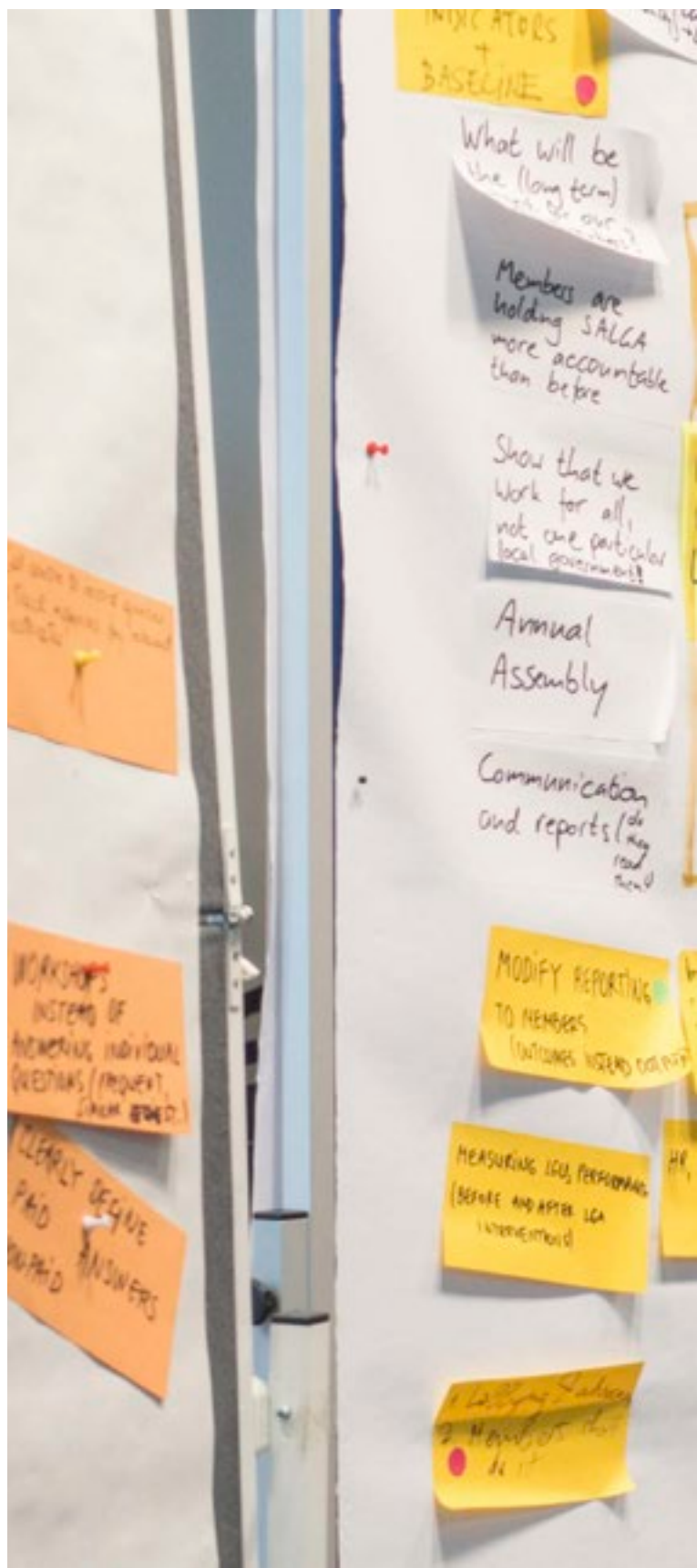
Mr Joel (SALGA) comments on the results of the peer-to-peer advice session.

Financing

Facing accountability towards their members and limited financial resources, LGAs may find it difficult to contract the adequate number of staff members with relevant experience. In most of the LGAs that Platforma surveyed for a comparative study, the recruitment of human resources in adequate number and training is a key challenge. On a global scale, less than half of the surveyed LGAs indicate they are able to pay competitive salaries.

In an internal survey for the dialogue event, all the participating LGAs indicated that members' fees are a source of revenue for them. However, international organisations' or donors' contributions and projects seem to be almost as important as a source of revenue as their members' fees. At least 3 of the LGAs stated that they receive central government's subsidies, and only one indicated to receive money for the provision of services.

Ideally, an LGA counts on members who are able and willing to fully finance its activities. However, they often face difficulties collecting those fees. In Sub-Saharan Africa, LGAs only collect around 30% of the membership

Financial independence and sustainability is an LGA's biggest challenge.

fees. In the MEWA-Region, conflicts and thus political instability compromise the local governments' ability to contribute to the LGA's finances.

Other complementary sources of revenue include donors, cooperation partners and sister LGAs, or revenues from letting buildings, paid trainings or services. Sometimes, the central government contributes to the LGA's financial resources.

Sustainable funding is a requirement for the provision of good local public services, and so is the funding of LGAs

The participants looked into the internal structures of LGAs and on how they affect decision-making and consensus-building.

Decision-making and consensus-building

LGAs assume the role of articulating the diverse interests of their members, providing policy expertise a large number of different topics and organising the decision-making process. Therefore, most of the time the associations structure their work in sections, departments, committees, and/or working groups.

Thematic committees allow for a two-way communication: first, to monitor local governments' interests and needs and to build on their practical, hands-on expertise (bottom-up); secondly, to communicate relevant information from the central government or state-of-the-art research from universities and think tanks to the members (top-down).

The focus of these thematic committees might be informational, i.e. to exchange information and expertise. Very often, these thematic committees additionally formulate policy recommendations to be considered by the LGA's board or assembly. Sometimes they can formulate binding policy positions for the LGA.

At the German Association of Cities, the headquarters have the role of preparing the decisions for the board through draft positions. These should reflect an informed, acceptable position for all sectors. Within the headquarters, all involved policy officers contribute to formulate these positions. Only then are the thematic technical committees involved.

In South Africa, the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act states that SALGA has to be consulted on all matters that affect local governments. In order to assure that SALGA's positions represent a consensus of all municipalities, all nine provinces need to find an agreement before a designated expert gets involved in official consultations.

Informed decisions require a facilitated dialogue among municipalities and experts.

Capacity building through peer learning and training

Providing high quality and demand-oriented services to their members is an aspiration that most LGAs worldwide share. However, as it requires additional resources and staff, very often the provision of membership services relies on external donor support.

The services provided by LGAs can be divided into core services and additional services, the latter often being fee-based and sometimes outsourced. The German Association of Cities, for example, provides central services such as representation at all relevant policy levels, whereas the provision of on-demand trainings on municipal administration is being provided by an independent entity, the KGSt. In other cases, LGAs themselves offer training modules or individual advice to their members, like in Ghana, where NALAG offers advice to their member cities upon request. Cités Unies in Lebanon offers seminars and workshops too, and cooperates with sister associations in Europe for that purpose.

Thanks to SCTM, Serbian practitioners from local administrations have access to 24 thematic networks. Within these networks, local experts exchange their expertise on a peer-to-peer basis. The challenge here is to keep these networks running and active, which means a significant amount of work for SCTM's staff.

> **Capacity-building for municipalities can be provided by LGAs, by specialised entities or by the municipalities themselves, through peer-to-peer exchange.**

Virtual forms of capacity building and exchange are often cheaper and more flexible than meetings. In Mozambique, as meetings with personal presence are hard to organise and fund, ANAMM facilitates the daily exchange and consultation in its six technical committees in a simple yet effective way, within thematic groups via the Whatsapp messenger app. When the new EU regulation on data protection came into force, the AACT in Austria implemented an online platform, allowing virtual training and exchange, as well as access to online documentation.

Another way to share good practices and foster good local governance is the benchmarking of member municipalities. ALAT (Tanzania) showed how the "Mayors' Award Scheme" helped to give public recognition to good local governance practices and, at the same time, offered support to those municipalities which did not score high.

The Mayors' Award Scheme, presented by Mr Ngodu (ALAT), is a practical tool to incentivize good local governance.

Results and outlook

Connective Cities' dialogue events are starting points for further cooperation, networking and joint projects. In this event, the participants formulated three project ideas.

ANAMM | Mozambique: How to implement a helpdesk for members

ANAMM currently works with several thematic Whatsapp-groups where questions can be asked and answered. For the future, as part of the restructuring of the Secretariat and in order to provide improved membership services, ANAMM is planning to implement a helpdesk. The goal of this website-based service will be to resolve the municipal officers' questions in a timely manner.

The case was discussed first in a peer-to-peer advice session, where participants mobilised their own experiences concerning helpdesks and assistance to members' requests. In a second moment, the action planning session provided the opportunity to plan for concrete next steps. After the dialogue event, ANAMM intends to further work on the concept of the helpdesk, involving their members and using the received input.

ANAMM's secretary general, Mr Nguenha, discussed options for a helpdesk with his working group.

Austria received a significant influx of refugees in 2015 and 2016. In the working group,
Mr Weninger and Ms Wolesa discussed options for support via the local government associations.

AACT | Austria and others:
How to give support and advice to member municipalities in the field of migration and asylum

Currently, a big challenge for local governments in the Middle East and in Europe is to deal with short-term population growth due to the influx of migrants. Apart from the politically sensible discussions that these migratory flows have caused, there are questions at a more technical level to be solved by the municipalities: How can the municipal staff be trained on a short-term basis to be able to respond to the additional demand of services?

How can data be generated and information exchanged among municipalities on refugees and their movements? How can the additional expenses be financed?

As a result of the action planning session, the central idea for a follow-up to this challenge was the implementation of a platform where municipalities can exchange both data and statistics and share their experiences on this topic.

DST | Germany, ALAT | Tanzania, and others:
How to strengthen the LGA's capacity to support member cities in their effort to localise the SDGs

Although the Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a resolution between national governments, it is clear that local governments and their associations have a substantial role to play to bring the SDGs to life. In most of the 169 targets, the involvement of local governments is required to achieve these goals.

In the action planning session, the participating LGAs focused on the question of how to support member cities in their effort to localise the SDGs, especially to report on the progress and the definition of indicators for it. The reporting on the SDGs is done at the national level, and there is no common framework for it – hence the necessity to define a country-level approach to measure and report on the SDGs.

In Serbia, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM) works on the localisation of the SDGs.
Ms Danilović shares the results of the working group.

Follow-up

As stated earlier, this dialogue event is to be seen as a starting point for further exchange between LGAs as part of a community of practice. One participant noted: "This event should not be a one-stop event." Connective Cities encourages the workshop participants to keep the discussions and the exchange going.

If you are an LGA representative and were not able to participate but you are interested in future events for LGAs, get in touch with us.

Participating LGAs are invited to engage in further exchange on their project ideas through Connective Cities. For the follow-up on the started discussions, the platform offers tailor-made tools for further exchange: expert assignments, local project workshops, virtual collaboration spaces, webinars, and advice on funding opportunities, among others.

As confirmed by the dialogue event, there is a significant potential for exchange and networking among LGAs' practitioners, based on good practice presentations and peer-to-peer-advice, and the Connective Cities platform can offer further opportunities to make this happen and continue to support this exchange based on local and practical needs.

During a thematical city tour, participants learned about Cologne's urban history and current challenges.