



**French  
Development Policies  
On  
Local Governance**



**Democratic governance is the art of governing by linking the management of public affairs at various territorial levels, from the local to the global, regulating relations within society and coordinating the action of a large number of stakeholders.**



# Local governance: a crucial level of democratic governance

**T**he French concept of local governance focuses on the exercise of shared responsibilities in the management of public affairs and the interaction between the various stakeholders and levels of governance.

**The local level is crucial in strengthening government legitimacy, citizenship and public service.**

The local level is not to be seen as a way of bypassing central government but on the contrary of providing complementary responses under the **principle of subsidiarity**.

The decentralisation issue needs to be addressed in the light of the **factor of time and the specific features of each situation**. Decentralisation is connected to socio-cultural paradigms and specific practices, depending on various concepts of the State and national background which involve adapting our development cooperation programmes. In some situations, especially where central government is poorly represented on the ground, the issue is more one of local development than of decentralisation.

**The territorial approach to public action**, essential for governance, should not prejudice the institutional forms it may take, from the basic delegation of central action at the local level to the extensive decentralisation with society governed by elected local authorities.



**Decentralisation is a part of democratic governance. It is intended to give local authorities their own resources and responsibilities separate from those of central government, to have their authorities elected by local communities and to ensure a better balance of power throughout the territory. Decentralisation brings the decision-making process closer to citizens, encouraging the emergence of local-level democracy. It aims to achieve socio-economic development in sectors that often suffer from over-centralised decision-making. It encourages territorial cohesion and the anchoring of democracy. It also contributes to fighting poverty.**



# Decentralisation: a process and a major political reform

**W**hen African states gained independence, they set themselves some clear tasks: national unity, economic development and a recognised presence on the international scene. At that time, the French development cooperation system supported nation-building and the strengthening of the local institutions that gradually emerged in West and Central Africa as decentralisation policies were adopted.

Decentralisation complements reform of administration and the public sector; support for the democratisation process and the establishment of the rule of law. It is seen as a solution to the crisis of government legitimacy and problems of development.

The decision to decentralise may be perceived as an advance in

- mobilising communities for sustainable development and territorial cohesion;
- extending and anchoring democracy at local level;
- restructuring government services and restoring legitimacy to public institutions;
- forming the basis for regional integration firmly grounded in African reality.

Alongside central administration, **local authorities and civil society** are asserting themselves as major stakeholders. They are the foundations for both local development and participatory democracy at a local level.



## Decentralisation: a factor for democratic renewal and a new way towards development

**D**ecentralisation is having a major impact on the behaviour both of citizens towards public institutions and of political parties. The parties are opening up to civil society. Local authorities are increasingly creating more forums for citizens to participate in the management of local affairs and establishing **democracy at a local level**. Local elected officials now face the challenge of meeting citizens' demands for access to basic services.

By focusing on citizens' expressed ambitions for development, decentralisation forms a link between development and democracy. Local development expressed in this manner enables national authorities to renew their commitment to long-term challenges and the territorial structure of development.

For that reason, French development policy approaches decentralisation from two directions: the desire for democratic renewal and the search for new ways towards development.

France's priorities reflect the Millennium Summit declaration: **poverty reduction**, governance, participation, peace and the resolution of disputes.



## The key points of French policy on decentralisation are the following:

- **Support for decentralisation and delegation policies** pursued by central governments
- **Support for associations of local elected officials**
- **Capacity-building for local authorities**, mobilisation of human and financial resources
- **Improvement in citizens' living conditions** via access to basic services and meeting crucial needs
- **Sustainable economic development** by mobilising local stakeholders and initiatives
- **Democratisation, respect for the rule of law, and citizens' participation**, which create the conditions for peace, facilitate the resolution of disputes and encourage the link between representative and participatory democracy



## French development cooperation actions:

- Multi-year bilateral projects for institutional support for central governments, associations of local elected officials, local authorities and civil society
- Capacity-building projects in contract management for local authorities in coordination with equipment projects funded by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD)
- Co-funding for projects proposed by French local authorities and NGOs
- Subsidies to organisations helping to promote decentralisation and the recognition of the African municipal movement
- Participation in multilateral programmes such as the Municipal Development Partnership (MDP), Cities Alliance, United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)
- Subsidies and intermediated loans to local authorities from the Agence Française de Développement
- Mobilisation of resources under debt relief and development contracts (C2Ds)
- Research and experimental projects on new forms of development together with the Urban Development Research Programme (PRUD)





# Decentralised development cooperation: a specific approach to development

**W**ith its decentralisation act in 1982 and subsequent acts in 1992 and 2005, the French government has laid down a new framework for the action of French local authorities. These now have autonomy in decentralised development cooperation with local authorities in other countries. To achieve greater effectiveness, the French development cooperation system seeks to enhance the synergies between central and decentralised action. The Delegation for Local Authorities' External Action (AECL) has the task of ensuring that there is consistency between the external action of central and local government. It implements central strategy for supporting decentralised development cooperation. To date, 3,000 French local authorities have undertaken nearly 10,000 decentralised actions covering every continent. They involve local authorities in 120 countries. Decentralised development cooperation in Africa accounts for 53% of French local authority cooperation projects, a total of €20 million. These receive 44% in co-funding from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## Major assets of decentralised development cooperation actors:

- **Exchange and know-how** on the basis of reciprocity and partnership, particularly in local authority contract management and local service engineering
- **Development of exchanges between residents**, to advance mutual understanding
- Mobilisation of **partnerships**, particularly with migrant associations
- **Long-term** cooperation between one local area and another
- Experience with **local autonomy and local sustainable development**
- Ability to undertake **actions to fight poverty**.





### Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DGCID) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The DGCID defines strategy and mobilises resources together with the development cooperation and cultural services of French Embassies. Support for decentralisation takes the form of designing and financing projects and programmes, particularly under the Priority Solidarity Fund (FSP).

#### Support for decentralisation involves

- 26 projects, average duration 36 months, financed by €37 million from the FSP plus a number of projects costing €8 million transferred to the AFD in 2005,
- 30 technical assistants seconded to these projects,
- 300 **decentralised development cooperation** projects co-funded by the DGCID to the tune of €9 million.





### **The French Development Agency**

The French Development Agency (Agence Française de Développement – AFD) is a public establishment with a general interest mission: to finance development. As a specialised financial institution, the AFD covers every continent — with two-thirds of its funds going to Africa — and the French overseas possessions, financing economic and social projects proposed by local public authorities, public-sector enterprises and the NGO private sector. The projects concern urban development and infrastructure, rural development, industry, financial systems, education and health.

In the field of urban development, the AFD finances operations in three strategic areas: poverty reduction and informal settlements, towns' economic environment and attractiveness, greater autonomy and resources for local authorities; they are all designed with a view to promoting decentralised development cooperation and respect for the environment.

The AFD works in partnership with other bilateral and multilateral donors.



- **French local authorities and associations of local authorities** such as Cités Unies France (CUF), Association des Maires de France (AMF), Assemblée des Départements de France (ADF), Association des Régions de France (ARF), Association Internationale des Mairies Francophones (AIMF), Association des Maires des Grandes Villes de France (AMGVF), Association Française du Conseil des Communes et Régions d'Europe (AFCCRE), Cités et Gouvernements Locaux Unis (CGLU);
- **Civil society, represented by associations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)**, which contribute to the emergence, structuring and capacity-building of local NGOs or grassroots community stakeholders, particularly for urban development, housing, provision of basic collective services, and resource and job-creating economic initiatives.
- **Operators, professional bodies, design offices and enterprises** that help define institutional frameworks, urban design, production and distribution of collective services.





**A strategic partner: the PDM “Partenariat pour le développement municipal” (Municipal Development Partnership)**

Since 1991, France, Canada and the European Union have helped finance the Municipal Development Partnership (MDP) in West and Central Africa. The programme was the result of a joint intention to develop a consultative structure to support the processes of decentralisation and municipal development. **The MDP encourages the emergence of local, national and regional competencies in the areas of municipal action and decentralisation.** It works towards the unification of the African municipal movement and its recognition at continent level. Its programmes include ECOFILOC (local economies and finances); CITACTIONS (support for the delivery of urban services to the people); POLDEC (support for decentralisation policies) and AFRICITIES (summit of the African municipal movement).



The **Ministry of Foreign Affairs site** provides news of French diplomacy and of development cooperation projects under France priorities > Development

[www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/)

The **Commission Nationale de la Coopération Décentralisée (CNCD) site** provides information in French on the CNCD's work, membership and operations. It includes a database of decentralised development cooperation partnerships.

[www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/cncd](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/cncd)

The **Agence Française de Développement (AFD) site** presents the AFD's programmes, conference timetable and major meetings. Under Publications there are economic, strategic and thematic papers. Main pages in English.

[www.afd.fr](http://www.afd.fr)

The **Municipal Development Partnership (PDM) site** presents the MDP's programmes, conference timetable and major meetings. It includes a directory of decentralisation stakeholders in Africa and situation reports in french on decentralisation in Africa, by country and comparatively across West and Central Africa.

[www.pdm-net.org/Newsite/english/](http://www.pdm-net.org/Newsite/english/)

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