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achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

● The recognition of the important role of decentralization and local authorities

The fundamental role of decentralization and of local authorities has been highlighted in a number of important international and regional contexts. In 2005 United Nations World Summit outcome underlined the “*important role of local authorities in contributing to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals including the Millennium Development Goals*”¹.

In 2005, the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan commented in an address to local government leaders “*How can we expect to reach the MDGs (...) without making progress in areas such as education, hunger, health, water, sanitation and gender equality? Cities and local authorities have a critical role to play in all of these areas (..) While our goals are global, they can most effectively be achieved through action at local level.*”

In March 2007, a European Parliament resolution strongly emphasized the role of local authorities in development cooperation. It recognized that the involvement of local authorities in development practices is essential for achieving the MDGs and ensuring good governance.

The European Commission Communication “*Local Authorities: actors in development*” of October 2008 stated that: “*Local authorities are bringing unique added value to development processes (...) and “have direct experience of and valuable skills in territorial development, decentralisation and strengthening democratic governance.”*”

Decentralization is also strongly supported by both bilateral and multilateral agencies – including the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union (EU), as well as national associations of local government authorities and civil society organizations.



administrators by citizens directly affects the relationships between authorities and citizens.

There have been a number of strong regional commitments to decentralization and recognition of the important role of local authorities in Africa. In June 2005, the first Pan African Conference of Ministers of Local Governments in Kigali explicitly recalled the First Conference of the European and African Regional and Local Assemblies, and the outcome stated that "*decentralization is an essential instrument for the consolidation and strengthening of democracy, good governance, local governance, peace building, economic growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable development, thus, it should be a tool for socio-economic transformation*".

At the second EU - Africa Summit in Lisbon in December 2007, the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) noted that: "*local authorities (are) at the center of current development challenges*".

● The importance of cooperation at local authority level

The process of decentralization can be facilitated by exchange and cooperation between local authorities within and between countries, and across regions. Such "decentralized cooperation", or cooperation at local and regional levels, is rapidly gaining recognition as an important means of consolidating decentralized governance, promoting local development, and introducing innovations in international cooperation.

"Decentralized cooperation" involves the establishment of effective and sustained relationships between networks of local and regional authorities and other stakeholders – which can be "south-south" or "north-south" relationships.. Such relationships strengthen the effective implementation of decentralized policies, within the context of national priorities and practices.

The experience from the decentralized cooperation and partnerships between local and regional authorities promoted in the context of the "Euro-African Partnership for Decentralized Governance", are proving to be an effective way to support the promotion of local

Despite significant evidence on the importance of women's participation and contributions, women continue to be excluded from important decision-making processes, particularly in the allocation of essential resources. There are multiple obstacles to women's participation which need to be explicitly addressed – including gender stereotypes on the expected roles of women and men in public life, inequalities in access to education and training, lack of finance and support systems, and unequal sharing of unpaid domestic work which significantly limits the time women have for employment and public involvement outside the home.

Local and regional authorities have important roles to play in increasing women's participation, and ensuring that there is adequate attention to the priorities, needs and contributions of women as well as men. Efforts are needed to develop legislation and policies; and to ensure equal opportunity and affirmative action measures are in place, as well as to provide gender-sensitivity training for all local and regional officials and

