



A NEW PARADIGM SHIFT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Citizens' participation at the local level, an asset for sustainable development 23rd of October 2013

The local dimension is considered a key factor for policies and actions for Development. In particular, decentralization processes and empowerment of local stakeholders are a real asset for sustainability and long term development. It also facilitates possible more participative and inclusive approach to growth.

The strength and efficiency of a fully operational, active and competent local authorities working together with responsive and empowered civil society, is almost a guarantee for development, respect of democracy and human rights.

Local democracy represents a step forward which implies elections at the local level and local responsibility of the political stakeholders. Decentralization is not to be conceived as a "deconcentration" of the State power but it implies a bottom approach to political processes with local assemblies accountable to citizens.

The conditions to develop local democracy and citizens' participation at the local level are to be found **a)** in the legislation at the national and international level (ie the EU is promoting a regional basis approach to its policies, bypassing the State level in many policies – regions, all over Europe, being the collectors of data and references and then implementors of policies and manager of resources) **b)** a focus on real decentralization with attribution of resources and competences (and awareness raising) for local authorities (political bodies and civil servants) is to be addressed in the development policies **c)** the civil society organisations should be ready to engage with local authorities as much as possible and consider relevant this action (some of them are still considering "irrelevant" this level of action) **d)** an awareness raising and capacity building (and enabling environment for working together – at the local level – local authorities/civil society – must be built

The decentralization of resources and power to local authorities must be accompanied with mechanisms of control, in particular with the presence and participation of citizens to avoid that it ends up in a pure deconcentration of power and corruption, present at the national level.

A particular attention must be put to valorize the work of local authorities – able to address the regional disparities – and to prepare the political representative /and civil servants – to respond the needs of citizens.

The European Union approach to Development, including its policy as for the Neighborhood area in Eastern Europe and Mediterranean area, will give a lot of emphasis to the cooperation of Local authorities and civil society in the upcoming programming period.

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