

**SECTORAL ACTIVITIES PROGRAMME**

Working Paper

**The role of local authorities in promoting decent work.  
Towards an applied research agenda for the  
construction and urban development sector**

**by Jeroen Klink\***

Working papers are preliminary documents circulated  
to stimulate discussion and obtain comments

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## Preface

This working paper, written by Prof. Jeroen Klink, presents a review of the literature on the role of local authorities in promoting decent work in construction and related services. It served as the basis for an action-research project on this theme which is being implemented in 2005-07 by the ILO Sectoral Activities Programme in partnership with the University of Geneva with funding from the Geneva International Academic Network.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper will focus on the role of local authorities in the generation of decent work in construction and related urban development services (water supply and basic sanitation, electricity and access roads, among others.)

Considering the very general scope of each of these thematic areas, i.e. decent work, local government and construction, we will briefly specify our definition of these concepts and outline the methodology that will be used in order to analyse the intersection of these areas.

It is nowadays commonly accepted that economic growth is a necessary but insufficient condition for development (Sen, 1999). The supposed equivalence between the two concepts, which for many years has been a cornerstone of traditional economics, suffered severe criticism considering its unacceptable outcomes in terms of socio-economic inequality, environmental degradation and mass unemployment (Sachs, 2002). In addition, there is increasing consensus among scholars that employment generation as such does not guarantee social, economic and political inclusion, citizenship and basic rights as defined by the main charters of the UN system.<sup>1</sup>

Within this context of increasing awareness about the need to broaden the economic growth approach in order to come to a sustainable human development perspective, the International Labour Office has elaborated the *decent work* concept. According to Egger and Sengenberger (2001, p.1), decent work implies “access to employment in conditions of freedom, the recognition of basic rights at work which guarantee the absence of discrimination or harassment at work, an income enabling one to satisfy basic economic, social and family needs and responsibilities, an adequate level of social protection for the worker and family members, and the exercise of voice and participation at work, directly or indirectly through self-chosen representative organizations”. In practice, this means that, over and above employment generation, several important dimensions are incorporated such as workers’ safety and health, social protection and income security, absence of discriminatory practices, decent remuneration, training, workers’ participation and collective bargaining. According to the authors, it seems appropriate to group the main elements of the decent work agenda under four main headings, namely *rights at work*, *employment*, *social protection* and *social dialogue*.

As we will highlight throughout this paper, there is a growing literature on *the role of local governments* within the national and international economy. More specifically, and of particular relevance for the purpose of

<sup>1</sup> More specifically the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the World Social Summit Declaration and Commitments (1995) and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998).

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this paper, local authorities have expanded their activities in the area of income and employment generation. Moreover, the profile of urban management itself has changed; local authorities have transformed themselves from mere implementation agents into promoters and enablers of sustainable urban development services. Frequently, this enabling role is reinforced by urban fiscal stress associated with the negative impact of structural adjustment programmes on local budgets. Moreover, local authorities increasingly seize opportunities to elaborate partnerships with the private sector and community groups.<sup>2</sup>

The global tendencies of the construction sector in terms of fragmentation, increasing use of casual labour and subcontracting practices, informalization, decreasing unionization and a declining role of the public sector have been well documented, partly as a result of sectoral studies that have been prepared to support international sectoral tripartite meetings organized by the ILO (e.g. ILO, 2001a). In addition, the urban development services such as solid waste, basic sanitation, electricity and access roads have traditionally been analysed within the more comprehensive literature on housing and housing policies. The general thrust of this literature is that housing and construction should not be isolated from the complementary urban development services, the challenge being to encounter efficient and effective delivery mechanisms (McCallum and Benjamin, 1985).<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned, this paper will focus on the interface between decent work, local government and construction. Within this broad area, we will make additional (methodological) choices.

First, and following the main literature, within the overall concept of decent work in the construction and urban development sector, we will effectively privilege the analysis of income and employment generation for disadvantaged segments. This is not to deny the importance of labour standards, health and safety conditions and voice, but is an explicit recognition that the role of local authorities in these areas in relation to national government is more limited. In addition, as will become clear in our subsequent analysis, the dimension of income and employment generation has become strategic within the new development agenda of local bodies.

Second, we will not go through detailed sectoral analysis. Instead, we will stress the limits and potentialities of local authorities in generating decent work in the overall urban development sector. In our view, and in line with the literature and international best practices, housing, water supply, basic sanitation, solid waste, access roads and electricity should be

<sup>2</sup> For a good overview of this tendency, see some of the case studies in the evaluation report on City Development Strategies promoted by UN-HABITAT, the Urban Management Programme, UNDP and the World Bank (Urban Management Programme, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> There is no denying that extensive sectoral analysis exists. In Bahl and Linn (1992), for example, a detailed study on the organization and financing of the principle urban development services (water supply, sewage, drainage, electricity, urban transport, etc.) is given.



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considered as elements of a broader integrated urban development strategy.

The paper is based on a review of the literature on the main overlap between decent work, local government and urban development services. In addition, we considered several policy publications from international donors, which emphasize, explicitly or otherwise, certain aspects of decent work, local government and urban services. More specifically, we analysed reference material from the ILO (decent work, construction), the World Bank (urban development services, urban management) and the Urban Management Programme (city development strategies).<sup>4</sup>

Third, documentation on particular case studies has been collected from the literature and/or through the exchange of information with professionals that were part of these experiences.<sup>5</sup>

The rest of this paper is structured along the following lines. Section 2 will briefly outline the relative absence of a local government perspective in the literature on decent work. This is followed in section 3 by an overview of the changing role of local authorities in an increasingly globalizing economy. The fourth section will briefly illustrate some best practices of local governments in the delivery of decent work, while in the conclusion we will make the case for a new action-oriented research agenda that will bridge the gap between the extensive literature on local authorities on the one hand and a predominantly nationally oriented agenda for decent work in the construction sector on the other hand.

<sup>4</sup> This includes training materials and manuals on specific topics prepared by these international donors.

<sup>5</sup> This was the case of the FUNACOM experience in Brazil where several professionals involved with this case were contacted.

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## 2. The relative absence of local government in the decent work agenda

In this section we will summarize the main approaches in the literature on decent work. However, it should be stressed that especially in the older literature on housing, urban development and slum upgrading, frequently no explicit mention is made of the concept itself, in spite of the fact that employment generation and decent work are implicit.<sup>6</sup> We will stress that – although a lot of theoretical and empirical work has been undertaken in this area (especially by the ILO (2001b) and related development agencies such as UN-HABITAT (the United Nations Human Settlements Programme)) – the role of local authorities in generating decent work in the housing and urban development sector has been largely ignored.

### 2.1 Public works and employment-intensive infrastructure

A first approach to decent work is the elaboration and implementation of public works and employment-intensive infrastructure programmes (EIIP) as an instrument of employment generation. Within the UN system, more particularly the ILO has an extensive track record with this instrument. As rightly pointed out by Keddeman (1997), EIIP have historically been used as a short-term strategy to deal with the adverse consequences of famine and poverty. Anti-famine programmes were implemented in the UK at the beginning of the 19th century. In addition, as a result of the world economic crisis in the 1930s, the interest in public works as an anti-cyclical instrument of employment generation and macroeconomic recovery was renewed. In the context of developing countries in the 1950s and 1960s, partly as a result of the theoretical work undertaken by Lewis (1954) in which labour was considered to be in abundant supply, employment-intensive infrastructure was considered a strategic element within a broader development strategy. This approach was also frequently sponsored through international development aid specifically focused on infrastructure works, either by using appropriate technology (the definition of appropriate to be seen in light of the resource endowments of a particular country), or by shifting from equipment to labour-based technologies (CIDB, 2004; ILO, 1998; De Veen, 1997).

The experience has by now been well documented and evaluated. In Keddeman (1997), for example, the approach is evaluated in terms of short-term direct and indirect effects (opportunity costs and economic benefits, backward and forward sectoral linkages) and longer-term outcomes (capacity building, quality of the assets constructed etc.). However, his analysis hardly considers the role of local authorities.

Again, in ILO (1998), there is considerable concern about the role of the preservation of labour standards and workers' rights. The study also

<sup>6</sup> For example, see Laquian (1983) and Skinner and Rodell (1983) for a good overview on the limits and potentialities of the early generation of upgrading programme that tried to link physical components with income and employment generation and community participation.

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gives specific recommendations and guidelines on the role of national ministries in doing so. Moreover, it is mentioned that employment-intensive infrastructure programmes can be considered as “launch pads” for small contractors to enter into the public construction market. Surprisingly, however, there is no evaluation on how local government can trigger off these processes. In addition, Keddeman argues that “urban based EIIPs are of relative recent origin and ILO involvement has been limited” (p. 21). Nevertheless, one of the author’s key recommendations in order to advance from short-term temporary employment and income support to a more structural approach is “building local capacity for the sustainable provision of basic services” (p. 22).

In CIDB (2004) a kind of best practices guideline is set up for employment-intensive construction work. Although the authors state that “projects that address these objectives allow the resources of the community to be built up in an endogenous manner, i.e. to be grown from within” (p. 1), there is hardly any analysis of the role of these stakeholders in general and of local governments in particular. In addition to the analysis of national implementation mechanisms in the African and Asian context, a great deal of emphasis is given to the quantitative technical and engineering coefficients in labour-based construction projects.

In a special 1992 edition of the *International Labour Review* on EIIP an overall evaluation of the international experience is presented. Again, the emphasis is given to critical and operational factors of success, but basically ignoring the role of local authorities in labour-based techniques. There is a general mention of capable local authorities as a crucial precondition for the success of these programmes. Gaude and Watzlawick (1992), for example, observe that “although the relevant policies, systems and procedures have to be authorized at the national level to ensure coherent planning, responsibility for actual implementation will actually fall to the local administrative bodies” (p. 9). Likewise, reviewing the experience of employment and income generation in water-supply projects in such diverse country settings as the Sudan, Madagascar, Tamil Nadu (India) and Morocco, Van Imschoot (1992) concludes that “the decentralization of responsibilities and authority is in fact the key element for the success of all these projects (p. 135). Finally, Garnier and Majeres (1992) stress the strategic role of strong local authorities and grass roots organizations in project management, implementation and evaluation of EIIPs, evidently in partnership with central government ministries and community-based organizations. According to the authors, decentralized structures are often missing, especially in the African projects, but are nevertheless key factors for effective monitoring and continuous evaluation of EIIPs. According to them, good results with labour-intensive techniques were achieved in Burkina Faso, Burundi and Rwanda.

## **2.2 Community contracts and small contractor development**

As mentioned, EIIP can be considered as a launch pad for a complementary approach to decent work in terms of the development of small contractors, small and medium-sized enterprises and community contracts. In practice, a series of pilot projects aimed at the dissemination of

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small contractor development and community contracts have been developed over the years.

Especially through efforts sponsored by the ILO these experiences have become documented in training material (Fransen et al., 2002) and evaluation studies that represent a second and complementary branch of relevant literature on decent work. In Tournée and van Esch (2001), for example, a schematic review of the experience of community contracts in the implementation of urban infrastructure is given. A detailed analysis of the main actors (beneficiaries representative groups, contracting authority, contractor, funding agency and the technical service providers) and the process is complemented by case studies from Hanna Nassif (Tanzania), Kalerwe (Uganda) and the community employment programme in South Africa. The main thrust of this literature is the need to strengthen the management capacity of communities in the construction and maintenance of urban infrastructure. The role of local government is mainly analysed in terms of a contracting authority. For example, it is stressed that local government and contracting authorities should facilitate advance payments in order to realize the entrance of communities and small-scale contractors. In addition, local authorities should strive towards an enabling environment for CBOs and community contractors through appropriate standards, permits and registration of community-based organizations (Tournée and van Esch, 2001, p. 38). It should also be noted that the authors' review covers the Asian and African context, where local government in general operates in a more centralized environment if compared with Latin America. In other words, while good local governance is stressed as a precondition for the implementation of community contracts, there is not much analysis of the role of local bodies over and above this general recommendation.

Within the Latin American context, perhaps one of the better known examples of the role of local authorities in relation to community contracting aimed at self-help and especially self-management by the community is the experience of the city of São Paulo with the so-called FUNACOM programme at the beginning of the 1990s (Denaldi, 1994; 1997). During the 1989-92 period the city of São Paulo created and financed the FUNACOM programme which aimed at increasing the local capacity of communities through self-management in housing and slum upgrading. A dense network of cooperative and contractual relations between city government, social and housing movements, NGOs and the technical assistance teams was established. In a relatively short period, the programme triggered off a substantial increase in the upgrading work with lower costs as compared to traditional large-scale contractor methods. In addition, and in spite of the discontinuity of the programme after the elections of 1993, the emphasis on self-management and community participation during the stages of elaboration, implementation and evaluation of the programme proved to be important. It had strengthened the endogenous capacities of communities, both in terms of their improved employment perspectives after completion of the programme, and considering their intense political mobilization around such issues as the future direction of housing and urban development policies in the city of São Paulo (Denaldi, 1997, p. 226).

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Crosswell and McCutcheon (2001) review the sub-Saharan experience in relation to small contractor development and employment. They argue that the literature since the late 1970s has emphasized two different approaches. The first is focused on aspects of the general management and administration of construction companies, while a second group of authors have stressed the importance of the regulatory and policy framework that could foster the growth of small contractors. The authors argue that, in spite of all these efforts, “much current discussion of small contractor development still emphasizes the same set of problems that were identified over twenty years ago. One of the problems – lack of continuity of work – has tended to be replaced by the phrase ‘the lack of sustainability’”. They argue that a comprehensive training for trainers and capacity-building programme focused on entrepreneurial, technical, managerial and administrative skills is a strategic prerequisite to the replication and sustaining of affirmative policies targeted at small and medium-sized private and/or community contractors. To make things even more complicated, however, the small contractor programmes often face the contradiction of the requirement of fast track delivery under severe time pressures which do not always allow longer-term “protected learning” (p. 12). In addition, the programmes often lack a “champion” who is prepared and able to fight for the enabling environment necessary for a programme to be created and fostered.

The analysis of Crosswell and McCutcheon illustrates the contradiction in much of the work on small contractor development programmes. While the importance of training, capacity building and the need for medium- and long-term sustainability is stressed, there is ironically no clarity on how local government could provide a regulatory and institutional framework aimed at upscaling successful pilot projects stimulating small-scale and community contractors.

### ***2.3 Public procurement and tendering***

A third group of studies on decent work has emphasized the strategic role of alternative procurement and tendering procedures. The analysis has concentrated on the possibilities of including additional criteria in traditional tendering mechanisms, such as employment levels for particularly disadvantaged and excluded segments of society. Watermeyer (2000), for example, evaluates the role of targeted procurement as an instrument of poverty alleviation and job creation in infrastructure projects. The instrument has been used within the South African context where it has been incorporated in the constitution of 1996 as a mechanism of targeting those groups that were excluded under the apartheid system (Watermeyer, 1997). In theory, targeted procurement aims at reaching additional (mainly) socio-economic goals within standard tendering procedures in a fair, transparent, competitive and cost-effective manner.

In several cases it has been reported that affirmative business enterprises have increased their market shares with a reasonable price

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premium in the tenders.<sup>7</sup> The Southern Metropolitan Local Council in the Greater Johannesburg region, for example, has worked with 13% of the labour targets in the first 9 contracts with an associated price premium of only 0.5% in the fiscal year 1996/97 (ibid., p. 17).

In addition, in April 1997 the South African Government launched a Green Paper on Public Sector Procurement Reform where the targeted procurement mechanism is being linked to other development objectives such as the stimulation of local economies, small and medium-sized enterprise support and affirmative action in relation to marginalized target groups within construction projects. Again, the Green Paper scarcely mentions the role of local governments.

## **2.4 Housing, slum upgrading and integrated urban development policies**

A fourth approach to decent work – although frequently implicit – is found in the literature on housing policies and slum upgrading (for example Denaldi, 2003; Werna, 2001). As mentioned before, this literature is quite specific and in general stresses the evolution of thinking and donor practices in relation to housing policies and upgrading (Maricato, 2001; Brakarz et al., 2002; Imparato and Ruster, 2003). The literature is also heavily based on the experience of international donors like the World Bank and others sectoral agencies like HABITAT. For the purposes of our analysis, several points should be mentioned (ILO and HABITAT, 1995).

First, urban housing policies in developing countries have evolved from the bulldozing of slums towards recognizing and upgrading them through the implementation of urban infrastructure and basic services and the regularization of land tenure. Second, in order to be successful, projects need to build on the existing knowledge of communities through participatory techniques. Finally, physical upgrading has to be integrated with other sectoral policies in order to connect the former slums into the overall urban and socio-economic fabric of the city. More specifically, upgrading needs to be complemented by programmes aimed at income and employment generation (capacity building, micro-credit, formation of cooperatives, etc.) and social inclusion (literacy campaigns, minimum income programmes etc.) in order to improve the socio-economic perspective of families. This improved income and employment scenario of families will allow them to continue to live in areas that have been improved through urban upgrading. This is what Denaldi (2003) and Brakarz et al. (2002) label as the third generation of urban housing policies (after the phase of bulldozing and simple physical upgrading), where socio-economic programmes complement the implementation of physical upgrading.

Although local government is evidently present in the above-mentioned approach on housing and upgrading policies, especially in the more recent literature on the integration of upgrading and local

<sup>7</sup> The direct financial premium measures the difference in price between the bid with the highest number of adjudication points (successful bid) and the most favorable offer (lowest acceptable bid).

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development policies, it remains to be seen how local government alone can financially sustain these complex programmes which, especially in metropolitan areas, quite frequently involve costly relocations in order to realize the upgrading work.<sup>8</sup> In addition, and although in the Brazilian context there is increasing evidence of success stories through integrated slum upgrading, the literature clearly points out that more thorough evaluation studies are required to increase our understanding of the role of local versus national governments in guaranteeing the financial and institutional sustainability of these programmes.<sup>9</sup> In addition, even in cities with a proven track record of pro-poor policies within integrated slum upgrading, it has proved more complex than expected to operate community contracting, small and medium enterprise (contractor) development and alternative procurement procedures in light of the fragile markets and local capacity in these slum areas (Prefeitura de Santo André & Comissão Européia, 2004).<sup>10</sup>

## **2.5 Inclusive development and decent work**

A fifth and more recent perspective on decent work is introduced by Ignacy Sachs (Sachs, 2002; 2004). In what might be labelled a holistic developmental perspective, the author outlines the need to adopt an integrated stance towards development, incorporating social, economic and environmental dimensions. According to the author, decent work and social inclusion should become essential elements of a new developmental paradigm where the labour context of production should be maximized and small producers should be transformed into small and medium-sized *entrepreneurs*, among others through affordable credit mechanism (e.g. cluster banks) and capacity building. The author gives a series of ideas on how decent work can be stimulated, for example by exploring alternative energy sources, small-scale contractor development, family agriculture and the development of clusters in targeted sectors. Although strategic cooperation among local governments is mentioned, for example through intermunicipal cooperation and regional development agencies, the role of local authorities is not elaborated upon further.

## **2.6 Recent tendencies**

Finally, there are some tendencies in the literature on decent work that allow a possible connection with a local government perspective. First, the ILO itself has become aware of some of the blind spots in its decent work agenda in terms of the relative absence of a local authorities perspective. In

<sup>8</sup> For example, Denaldi (2003) claims that in the Brazilian context, especially in the metropolitan areas, the density levels in slums have become so high that in order to realize the upgrading activities it is necessary to partially relocate families. These are complex and costly operations for which local governments often do not have the required financial resources.

<sup>9</sup> In this respect see also the recent policy publication from the Brazilian Ministry for Cities (Ministério das Cidades, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> See also in this respect Laquian (1983) on similar problems of previous income and employment programmes in slum upgrading during the 1970s, especially in the Asian context.

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*Cities at work* (ILO, 2004), its recent policy publication, it has mapped out the need for a connection of the elements of the decent work agenda with cities and local stakeholders.

In addition, especially in Latin America, some experience has been built up with the so-called social development funds. These funds were traditionally set up on a temporary basis in order to deal with the adverse impact of structural adjustment programmes. The social development funds were aimed at the fast implementation of a series of smaller infrastructure projects on a results-based and flexible basis, often bypassing traditional ministerial structures (Siri, 2000). Quite frequently local authorities were involved in the project cycle and in some cases the funds were instrumental in stimulating broader discussions on the design of municipal development funds (*ibid.*, p. 7). According to this author, the general impression is that funds were indeed successful in delivering project results and alleviating the direct and short-term consequences of poverty associated with structural adjustment programmes. However, several doubts have been raised about the capacity of the funds to promote medium and longer-term impacts after the completion of projects and the closing of the funds.

In fact, in several cases it has proved difficult for local communities to operate and maintain the assets that were created through the social development funds. Thus, it remains to be seen how the mechanism of the funds can transform “communities from beneficiaries to generators of their own well being” (*ibid.*, p. 23). Again, the role of local governments seems to be crucial and needs to be explored further within the more detailed discussion on the future of social development funds as an instrument of poverty alleviation and social inclusion.



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### **3. Local government and urban employment generation – The relative absence of a decent work perspective applied to the construction and urban development sector**

#### **3.1 *The new role of cities in the global economy***

It has by now become overwhelmingly clear that cities and their regions perform new roles in the international community (Scott, 2001; Borja and Castells, 1997; Klink, 2001). For the purpose of our discussion, three elements should be highlighted.

The first element is related to the new territorial and competitive role of cities in the global economy. That is, local stakeholders, instead of passively depending on macroeconomic and microeconomic forces being set in motion by globalization, increasingly become aware of the potential competitive advantages of local territories, for example based on the presence of a pool of qualified labour, positive technological externalities and a network of specialized firms (Krugman, 1996; 1997).

As authors such as Scott (2001) have observed, this new role evolves in parallel with the changes in overall macro- and microeconomic frameworks that have been occurring in Europe and the USA since the 1970s, and in the developing countries approximately since the mid-1980s. As a result of the impact of these processes of economic restructuring, cities and metropolitan areas have increasingly taken up new challenges in the area of local development and income and employment generation without depending exclusively on national level initiatives.

Evidently, this new role did not develop overnight. On the one hand, from the 1970s onwards national governments had increasingly retreated from traditional Keynesian style active macroeconomic management aimed at full employment and income generation (Martin and Sunley, 1997). These policies had become extremely difficult to implement and lost some of their effectiveness in the context of an increasingly deregulated international economy characterized by massive volatile flows of international financial capital.

At the same time, the gradual tendency towards deregulation and trade-liberalization had impacts on the behaviour of firms, especially on those that had operated within relatively protected domestic markets. Consequently, these firms initiated a series of microeconomic adjustments aimed at managerial and technological modernization. This process increased overall levels of productivity, but did not always immediately create positive effects on industrial employment. In effect, in many cities characterized by relatively obsolete industrial structures, the increase in productivity and the shift from industrial towards tertiary employment resulted in severe net losses in formal employment.

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Thus, many cities, concentrating an important segment of national economic activity, were severely affected by the impact of macroeconomic and microeconomic restructuring. Within this troublesome scenario, an increasing number of cities and metropolitan areas became aware of the potential of creating bottom-up multi-stakeholder strategies aimed at income and employment generation. The bottom line of experiences in different cities such as Rotterdam, Barcelona and Milan, among others, was to create the right conditions for endogenous development taking advantage of the local assets available within the city (Krugman, 1997). The quintessence of these experiences was based on the perception that a productive mobilization of public and private actors and assets would allow cities to make creative use of globalization, instead of becoming its passive victim, and simultaneously improve urban productivity, wages, labour conditions and the overall quality of living (Sengenberger and Pike, 1999).

The second element of interest regarding the new role of cities and urban regions is related to their potential in stimulating cooperation among local stakeholders through participatory processes. There is by now a large literature that relates decentralization to the deepening of local democratic processes through the mechanism of voice and accountability (e.g. GTZ & PGU, 1995). For the same reasons, decentralization would also increase the quality and the efficiency of service delivery (Bahl and Linn, 1992; World Bank, 1993; Musgrave and Musgrave, 1995; O'Sullivan, 1993), and facilitate the involvement of a greater number of stakeholders, thereby improving the quality of public policies throughout all phases of the project cycle.<sup>11</sup>

Along these lines, Borja and Castells (1997) claim that the nation state has been hollowed out. On the one hand, as we mentioned before, its macroeconomic apparatus has lost effectiveness in light of the size and volatility of massive flows of financial capital at a global level. On the other hand, considering the global transformation towards more democratic and diversified local communities, each having differential preferences and claiming an increasing voice and accountability in decision-making processes, national levels lose out against local and metropolitan systems of governance that are closer to local constituencies. In addition, considering the rise of the network society and the international space economy of flows (Castells, 1989), local communities in urban areas would also have increasing facilities to sidestep traditional national borders and to exchange experiences on a global scale.

Although Abrucio and Soares (2001) and Stren (2000) rightly observe that the reasons behind the process of decentralization are sometimes diverse (downloading of expenditures and responsibilities, more voice and accountability, creating fragmentation in order to maintain "clientelist" power relations), there is widespread and intuitive evidence that some of the above causal relationships between decentralization, local democracy,

<sup>11</sup> That is, throughout the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of projects. See Abrucio and Soares (2001) and Dowbor (1996).

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accountability and efficiency are indeed correct considering a global tendency towards wider responsibilities for directly elected general purpose local governments.

In the context of the developing countries we have also witnessed a gradual process towards decentralization, which has been well documented in previous studies (GTZ & PGU, 1995; Stren, 2000). In addition, an ever-increasing number of cities and city-regions in the developing countries are experimenting with innovative tools of direct democracy, such as participatory budgeting, city visioning and strategic planning.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.2 Changing roles for local authorities and urban management**

As a consequence of the above-mentioned broader transformations in the role of cities within the national and international development context, it has become clear that the role of local authorities and urban management itself are also changing rapidly. The synthesis of these changes has been well documented by such authors as Harvey (1989) and Hall (1995) for the European and US context when analysing the evolution from *urban managerialism* to *urban entrepreneurialism*. These authors highlight three elements relevant to our analysis.

First, and as related to the above-mentioned tendency of global economic restructuring, local leadership starts to incorporate new themes and change previously established priorities on the policy agenda. While the management of a set of urban services (housing, basic sanitation, health, education etc.) as such does not disappear from the policy agenda, issues like competitiveness and sustainable employment and income generation gain priority, also in light of the gradual retreat of national government from these areas.

Second, there is a changing international scenario characterized by an increasing level of competition among cities, which forces local authorities to engage in innovative and area-wide strategies of urban and economic revitalization. Considering the volatility of the international scenario and the pressure from local constituencies, an increasing number of cities start to adopt more flexible institutional arrangements and are willing to take up new responsibilities (such as local economic development, urban security etc.), even if these tasks are not directly formalized as statutory responsibilities.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The instrument of participatory budgeting has received increasing academic and policy-oriented attention from Europe, the USA, Canada and the UN in light of its potential to increase the quality and transparency of policy making in cities and metropolitan regions, and to trigger off practices of good governance.

<sup>13</sup> There are clear examples of this tendency in the Latin American setting, particularly in a context of strong local governments. In Brazil, for example, the issue of urban violence is a good case. According to the Brazilian constitution, public security is a responsibility of the states and the federal government. Nevertheless, and particularly in light of the growing perception of urban violence among the population, a number of cities, and especially the ones in metropolitan areas, have set up institutional structures aimed at the prevention of violence.

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Third, there is a growing perception of the role of local governments as articulating and enabling actors within a multi-stakeholder environment. This represents a contrast with the previous model according to which local authority was considered a mere implementing agent, within a narrower functionalist-technocratic approach, frequently without much participation from public and private stakeholders (Helmsing, 2001). The concept of governance, meaning the process through which a set of governmental and non-governmental actors (civil associations, public-private partnerships, labour unions, enterprises etc.) organize for collective goods and policy-making, indicates a clear shift in paradigm.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the *product* of urban planning itself shifts from the comprehensive and detailed master plans, often elaborated without much involvement of the actors from the public and private sector, towards more operational and area-based strategic plans that are elaborated and discussed with a wide range of stakeholders from the local community. Through their proper structure, which traditionally transforms long-term visions of income and employment generation and quality of living into concrete projects and activities implying definitions of actors, responsibilities and resources, the strategic plans usually facilitate a continuity and a pragmatic link between planning and implementation.

The above-described shift in the culture of urban management and local governance has also become increasingly relevant for developing countries since the beginning of the 1990s, especially in the Latin American context. A growing number of cities take up new responsibilities without formally being directly responsible for these thematic areas. They do so in a pro-active and flexible manner, without shying away from some of the (financial) risks involved with these new tasks. In addition, leadership in urban areas is also increasingly aware of its important role, not as final implementing agents that centralize all responsibilities, but as articulators that are able to trigger off strategic projects through public-private partnerships. According to Cocco et al. (2001), local and area-based metropolitan structures in Latin America have the potential to become enablers within networked territorialized management.

The above-mentioned general review of the literature on the changing roles of cities and local authorities within the national and international scenarios allows us to draw some preliminary conclusions. First, and with a few exceptions, there is a lack of more detailed studies on the potential of a decent work perspective within the more traditional housing and urban development agenda of local authorities. Surprisingly, we have found ample reference material on the new productive role of local governments within the globalized economy. This has resulted in innovative evaluations of local economic development and employment strategies in general

<sup>14</sup> "The term governance is now widely employed to describe the multifaceted types of social and economic coordination at issue here. Concretely, many processes of governance today involve not just agencies of government but also non-governmental organizations, civil organizations, private-public partnerships, and so on. The term can apply equally well to coordination of the complex economic and social environment of the global city-region as a whole as it can to collective action in regard to specific segments of urban life" (Scott, 2001).

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(cooperatives, clusters, incubators, micro-finance etc.). However, these evaluations lack a decent work perspective on the role of local governments while dealing with its traditional responsibilities within the housing and urban development sector. The exception to this rule is the literature on upgrading that was mentioned in the previous section of this paper.

Second, there is indeed a series of more empirical analyses focused on the role of local authorities as strategic players within poverty alleviation strategies. Particularly within the more decentralized policy environment in Latin American countries several authors have highlighted the potential role of local authorities in setting up and implementing inclusive policies through safety nets, minimum income programmes linked to school attendance and other compensation strategies targeted at the most vulnerable segments (Pochmann, 2003; 2004). However, the main thrust of this literature is linked to economic inclusion and solidarity economics with few links to the housing and urban development services provided by local authorities (Kraychete et al., 2000).

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#### **4. Increasing evidence of best practice of local governments in generating decent work in the construction and urban development sector**

In spite of the relative scarcity of literature that explicitly focuses on the role of local authorities in delivering decent work in the construction and urban development sector, there is increasing evidence of best practice in this field.

The field experience of the ILO, specifically in the African and Asian setting, highlights cases such as the Hanna Nassif community in Dar es Salaam. This case refers to a low income community that organized itself after severe flooding in 1991. After registering as a community-based organization, a partnership was established with the local authority, which approached the ILO and UN-HABITAT for technical support. The project was based on community contracting and self-management; funds were directly channelled to the community representatives who signed cheques together with the city council. The community planned and monitored the work with support from the technical assistance team that had been seconded by the city council. The first phase of construction works was started in 1994 and terminated in 2000 with the completion of drinking water supply and drainage facilities. In the second phase the community started to operate water kiosks, solid waste services and credit schemes for small loans to community groups (ILO, 2004, p. 25).

In the South African context, Crosswell and McCutcheon (2001) mention the first examples of small contractor and labour-intensive construction in municipal upgrading in Ilinge (Eastern Cape), which occurred in the 1980s. The programme, which consisted of construction of maturation ponds, water and sewer mains, receptor tanks and road and surface drainage, was unbundled in 400 individual contracts that were executed by 35 different small contractors. In 1987, the experience was replicated in the denser urban setting of Soweto aimed at the replacement of secondary water mains.

As already mentioned, in the Latin American context the self-management experience (“mutirão”) in the city of São Paulo during the Erundina administration at the beginning of the 1990s was innovative in the sense that the local government performed an active role in setting a conducive legal and financial environment aimed at self-help and self-managed housing and upgrading. Specific municipal legislation was created for the special purpose fund FUNACOM, which established roles and responsibilities for self-management.

The opposition party that won the elections in 1993 did not continue this self-management programme. Nevertheless, as mentioned by Rolnick and Cymbalista (2003), the programme itself received wide press coverage during the HABITAT-II summit meeting in Istanbul as it had been selected by a technical committee as one of Brazil’s “best practices”.

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In fact, while reviewing the achievements and mistakes in several self-management experiences of housing cooperatives and social movements in Brazilian cities, we can draw several lessons in terms of a decent work perspective (Rolnick and Cymbalista, 2003). More particularly, it proved possible to provide good quality housing projects through self-help and self-management as concrete alternatives to standard mass production of housing. Second, despite the inherent power conflicts that involve local government, community-based organizations and political parties, and which are practically inevitable in a complex process like this, the community gained construction and management capabilities, in addition to an increased political awareness that was accumulated throughout the process. As a result, in March 1995, the provincial government of the state of São Paulo approved a law that provided the legal framework for self-managed housing projects. According to the authors, in the period 1995-2002, 17,470 housing units were delivered through self-managed processes in 102 community groups (*ibid.*, p. 291).

There is also increasing evidence of evolution in specific sectors related to housing and construction. Several Brazilian cities, for example, are implementing experiments aimed at increasing the participation of cooperatives and small private firms in a chain of activities related to solid waste management (i.e. collection, processing and recycling). In practice, this will decentralize and break open a sector that traditionally has been monopolized by large firms. National government seems to be keen on stimulating these tendencies. The National Development Bank BNDES, for example, is supporting the cooperatives and the city of Santo André (metropolitan São Paulo) by means of a grant of US\$ 400,000 aimed at investment in equipment for decentralized transfer stations, capacity building, environmental education and market research in order to build a sustainable and more participative model for solid waste management which also creates decent work. Along the same lines, the ILO (2001c) has documented similar tendencies in cities like Nairobi where the formal monopoly of the Nairobi City Council in solid waste management is being opened up by allowing private sector firms and community organizations to enter into specific operations. A 1997 survey indicated that the number of community-based organizations acting in the field of solid waste management has increased as the result of a more enabling institutional framework that was created throughout the 1990s (*ibid.*, p. 18).

Another interesting case, mentioned by both Sachs (2002) and Klink (2001), is the experience of a set of 7 municipalities in the metropolitan region of São Paulo, the so-called ABC region.<sup>15</sup> In light of the dramatic impact of the opening up of the Brazilian market in the 1990s, the region, which is known as the Brazilian Detroit in light of the importance of the car industry within the overall regional economy, faced increasing levels of unemployment, informalization and urban poverty. As a result, both the mayors and leadership from the private sector and civil society came

<sup>15</sup> The acronym is taken from the names of the most important cities in the region, that is, Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo and São Caetano do Sul.

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together in order to elaborate a strategic response aimed at improving both the quality of living and levels of competitiveness. As a result, several informal regional planning mechanisms have been established since the 1990s. More particularly, the *Chamber of the ABC Region* was created by the state government of São Paulo, 7 mayors from the ABC region, the enterprise associations, labour unions and important community-based organizations. It succeeded in setting up and implementing a rather sophisticated framework for strategic planning. Through the use of participatory techniques, the Chamber has been able to elaborate important projects on capacity building, employment generation for excluded segments of the region, infrastructure planning and economic competitiveness.

However, it remains to be seen how a predictable and transparent funding mechanism can be arranged for these innovative forms of regional governance, particularly within the Brazilian system of fiscal federalism, which only recognizes municipalities, states and federal authority.

The above-mentioned case and other similar cases have not yet been analysed in detail in terms of their limits and potentialities in stimulating a decent work agenda for local governments in the construction and urban development sector. As a matter of fact, and especially considering the widespread tendencies towards decentralization and democratization, a preliminary conclusion of our work is that we have found surprisingly few in-depth and authoritative case studies on the role of cities in elaborating and implementing a decent work agenda in such sectors. And even within the context of increasing evidence of positive experience in developing countries, a more consolidated understanding is needed of the transformations that are taking place in urban management and service delivery itself, and more specifically how these changes within local authorities can be linked to urban strategies on poverty alleviation, local economic development and decent work.



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## 5. The missing link – Towards an applied research agenda on the role of local authorities in generating decent work in the construction and urban development sector

A more in-depth analysis of the missing links between decent work, local government and construction is urgently needed. Our analysis has shown that the decent work agenda is predominantly focused on national government issues, while by and large the literature on local government, at least until recently, has bypassed the issue of decent work.

As a matter of fact, we have built up the case for the establishment of an applied research agenda that is able to bridge the gap between these thematic areas that have developed in a relatively independent manner. In our view, this agenda will also be able to shed light on criteria for the evaluation of successful projects/cases, and guidelines on how these cases can be mainstreamed into programmes and policies towards a pro-active role for local governments in the generation of decent work.

Our review of the literature and preliminary analysis of case evidence suggest that the following elements will be important features on this applied research agenda.

- *National and local government interdependencies aimed at providing financial sustainability of successful approaches*

As mentioned, integrated urban upgrading, specifically in metropolitan areas, is expensive and complex. What are the financial guidelines that allow successful pilot projects to be mainstreamed into upgrading policies that are in line with the decent work perspective? The initial hypothesis that needs to be tested is that without the financial supporting role of national governments, urban integrated upgrading is likely to remain at the project level and will suffer discontinuities in light of the lack of financial resources.

In addition, for the other aspects of decent work – especially related to labour standard setting, health and security conditions on the job, income insurance, social protection and voice – a balance between elaboration (national level) and implementation and monitoring (local level) will have to be struck with the active involvement of local governments. As mentioned, these aspects of decent work have not been touched upon in this paper.

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– *Decent work and the changing role of local authorities*

Local authorities have increasingly assumed new roles beyond the mere *management* of urban services (housing, basic sanitation, education, health etc.). In particular, as predicted in a World Bank policy paper in the early 1990s, the *entrepreneurial* dimension of urban governance, as reflected in the rise of strategies aimed at income and employment generation, local economic development and poverty alleviation, has become a prominent feature of the new urban agenda of local authorities (World Bank, 1991). However, there seems to be scarce evidence on how, at least at the local level, the *managerial and entrepreneurial agendas* meet in order to scale up and consolidate decent work programmes at the local level.

– *The timing of an endogenous development of a decent work agenda at the local level*

Our review has stressed the strategic role of local authorities in stimulating an enabling environment aimed at community-based development through decent work. However, the literature shows the existence of a complex trade-off between the short-term need to deliver concrete and tangible results in terms of employment generation and small and medium enterprise development on the one hand, and, on the other, the requirement to stimulate longer-term protected learning, institutional strengthening and capacity building of local networks and actors. In practice, then, what is the timing of these endogenous learning processes and what can local government do to stimulate them (incubator programmes for cooperatives, access to alternative credit mechanism, information, networking etc.)?

– *More thorough and systematic overview of the state of the art of best practice*

Our review of the existing literature seems to be coming back to a limited number of well-known case studies. However, through professional experience and informal contacts with other cities (especially within the Latin American context), our hypothesis is that there is an increasing number of good practices in the field which have not been documented and evaluated yet.<sup>16</sup> A systematic review of existing cases and tendencies in this field should be undertaken.

<sup>16</sup> There are several examples of city networks that generate valuable information on case studies. In the Latin American context, also in line with the international tendency, the model of decentralized technical cooperation among municipalities is growing. The Mercocidades City Network, for instance, is counting on the participation of more than 140 cities from Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile and Peru. The network is aimed at complementing – at the city level – the formation of the common market in the Mercosur area. This city network exchanges experiences in the field of local economic development, gender, education and sustainable development, among other themes. Cities like Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte and Santo André have been exchanging practices of participatory solid waste management. Likewise, the Network has started to negotiate with the Brazil office of the ILO in order to establish a local agenda for decent work within the Mercosur context.

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- *Specific methodologies of cost-benefit analysis appropriate for the detailed appraisal of successful decent work projects and programmes that were promoted by local authorities*

Finally, and related to the previous argument, traditional cost-benefit analysis of case studies can be applied along the lines suggested by Keddeman (1997). In addition, general guidelines for project and programme appraisal have long been applied within traditional evaluation studies for development assistance.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, considering the intrinsic complexities of working with target groups that have traditionally been excluded from many public policies, standard cost-benefit techniques are likely to lean towards more tangible short-term financial burdens associated with the setting up and maintenance of decent work programmes, while medium-term benefits associated with indirect employment generation (forward and backward linkages within production chains), capacity building and social inclusion tend to be incorporated only with great difficulty in the more analytical work. Thus, in practice, this will require a conscious utilization of the traditional cost-benefit techniques in order to broaden the perspective on the role of local authorities within the decent work agenda.

17 The classical manual written by Dasgupta, Sen and Marglin (1972) is a good example. In a separate section, the appraisal of the employment objective is considered. This book was reprinted in 1993 and its methodologies were updated in subsequent publications sponsored by the UNIDO system on appraisal of private and public investments (UNIDO, 1980; 1986). UNIDO also developed specific software on the financial and economic appraisal of projects and programmes (the so-called COMFAR model), which is based on the methodology of the initial manual written by Dasgupta, Sen and Marglin. Finally, for a somewhat different application of cost-benefit in the construction sector (although at the national South African level) see Standish (2003).

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## Sectoral working papers <sup>1</sup>

	<i>Year</i>	<i>Reference</i>
The Warp and the Web Organized production and unorganized producers in the informal food-processing industry: Case studies of bakeries, savouries' establishments and fish processing in the city of Mumbai (Bombay) (Ritu Dewan)	2000	WP.156
Employment and poverty in Sri Lanka: Long-term perspectives (Vali Jamal)	2000	WP.157
Recruitment of educational personnel (Wouter Brandt and Rita Rymenans)	2000	WP.158
L'industrie du textile-habillement au Maroc: Les besoins des chefs d'entreprise et les conditions de travail des femmes dans les PME (Riad Meddeb)	2000	WP.159
L'évolution de la condition des personnels enseignants de l'enseignement supérieur (Thierry Chevaillier)	2000	WP.160
The changing conditions of higher education teaching personnel (Thierry Chevaillier)	2000	WP.161
Working time arrangements in the Australian mining industry: Trends and implications with particular reference to occupational health and safety (Kathryn Heiler, Richard Pickersgill, Chris Briggs)	2000	WP.162
Public participation in forestry in Europe and North America: Report of the Team of Specialists on Participation in Forestry	2000	WP.163
Decentralization and privatization in municipal services: The case of health services (Stephen Bach)	2000	WP.164
Social dialogue in postal services in Asia and the Pacific: Final report of the ILO-UPU Joint Regional Seminar, Bangkok, 23-26 May 2000 (Edited by John Myers)	2000	WP.165
Democratic regulation: A guide to the control of privatized public services through social dialogue (G. Palast, J. Oppenheim, T. McGregor)	2000	WP.166
Worker safety in the shipbreaking industries: An issues paper (Sectoral Activities Department and InFocus Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment)	2001	WP.167
Safety and health in small-scale surface mines – A handbook (Manfred Walle and Norman Jennings)	2001	WP.168

<sup>1</sup> Working Papers Nos. 1-155 are not included on this list for reasons of space, but may be requested from the Sectoral Activities Branch (SECTOR), Social Dialogue, Labour Law, Labour Administration and Social Activities Department, Social Dialogue Sector, International Labour Office (ILO).

	<i>Year</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Le rôle des initiatives volontaires concertées dans la promotion et la dynamique du dialogue social dans les industries textiles, habillement, chaussure (Stéphanie Faure)	2001	WP.169
The role of joint voluntary initiatives in the promotion and momentum of social dialogue in the textile, clothing and footwear industries (Stéphanie Faure)	2001	WP.170
La situation sociale des artistes-interprètes de la musique en Asie, en Afrique et en Amérique latine (Jean Vincent)	2001	WP.171
The social situation of musical performers in Asia, Africa and Latin America (Jean Vincent)	2001	WP.172
Guide sur la sécurité et hygiène dans les petites mines à ciel ouvert (Manfred Walle and Norman Jennings)	2001	WP.173
Seguridad y salud en minas de superficie de pequeña escala: Manual (Manfred Walle and Norman Jennings)	2001	WP.174
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