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International Development Report

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This is an update on the progress of the Africa Peer Review Project and next steps forward for the LGA.

Recommendation

Members are asked to discuss and comment on upcoming activities.

Action

LGA officers to take forward as directed by Members.

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International Development Report

Background

1. There is growing recognition internationally and within the UK that councils are important partners in tackling underdevelopment and promoting economic growth. British local government enjoys a strong reputation abroad and there is increasing demand upon our sector's self-improvement work in particular.
2. Our commissioned work includes capacity building activities, peer support and general training and sharing of good practise for which there are a number of basic political steers guiding it;
 - 2.1. All work is based on demand from sister LGAs or councils in the developing world.
 - 2.2. The funding for projects is sourced externally.
 - 2.3. Delivery is based on practitioner-to-practitioner support, rather than the use of expensive consultants.
3. In 2010 the LGA was asked to undertake a peer review with the South African LGA based on the UK's experiences of peer challenge. As a result United Cities & Local Government Africa (the pan-African LGA) commissioned the LGA to support it in piloting the concept across Africa during the course of 2012. Funded by the government of Luxembourg, the programme draws on the UK's experience of peer review over the last decade by delivering five pilot peer reviews in five African countries for either a local authority or a national local government association in Uganda, Ghana, Cameroon, Namibia and Ivory Coast.
4. The programme has been developed and delivered by the LGA through a successful collaboration between the Policy & Finance Team and the Peer Support Team, drawing on their respective skills and expertise, and is a good example of how joint working across the organisation is delivering positive outcomes and enhancing the LGA's wider reputation.

The Project

5. Since the start of the programme the majority of the activities in the project plan have been carried out. This includes:
 - 5.1. design and delivery of a bespoke training program on peer review in London for a cohort of African peers from 13 African countries (February/March 2012); and
 - 5.2. completion of four out of the five pilot peer reviews in Namibia, Ghana, Cameroon and Uganda (June to November 2012).

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6. Due to a number of logistical challenges, the fifth and final pilot peer review in the Ivory Coast was unable to take place before the end of 2012. UCLGA has subsequently made a formal request to the government of Luxembourg for a six month extension until June 2013 in order to complete the final peer review, an external evaluation and audit activities.

Project outcomes

7. The project has been well received by the participating organisations and the UK and African peers. The feedback from a Pan-African dissemination seminar in December was very positive and has further increased the LGA's reputation as a respected and effective development partner.
8. For the African peers and the African organisations receiving a peer review, the project has proven to be a unique learning experience. The feedback from the training in February and each of the five peer reviews demonstrated a broad consensus that the philosophy and methodology of the UK's peer review model is adaptable to most African contexts. Moreover, the personal development that the African peers experienced on their peer reviews has been considerable.
9. Feedback from the UK peers has also been very positive, not only in terms of what they were able to offer their African counterparts but also the personal reflections on their work back home that the experience provided. Considering some of the challenging environments the UK peers worked in, as well as the cultural, political and linguistic sensitivities they navigated, their commitment and professionalism has been a powerful example of what can be achieved by UK local government peers internationally.
10. Throughout the course of the programme there have been a number of logistical and communication challenges which is understandable on a transnational programme of this nature. The LGA has also, at times played a greater role in the delivery of the programme than was envisaged. It has therefore become crucial that the remaining activities, including the evaluation process ensures African ownership of the outcomes.

Upcoming development activities

11. As part of Department for International Development's (DFID) efforts to improve the cost-effectiveness and transparency of Britain's aid spending, the Secretary of State for International Development has recently launched a new Statement of Priorities and Expectations for Suppliers. It sets out principles which DFID expects all its suppliers to adhere to, ensuring consultancies "work harder to show they are value for money". The LGA does not operate as a consultancy and has long argued that development aid can be delivered more cost-effectively by working more strategically with local government.
12. Parallel to this, DFID's work on sustainable city development has recently taken a step forward with the publication of "Future Proofing Cities", a major new report looking into accelerating urbanisation in 129 cities in 20 countries. In light of our messages about the the unique contribution that local government can make on sustainable municipal development, particularly governance, the LGA is seeking further dialogue with DFID in these areas.

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13. Donor interest in UK local government, the LGA's improvement work and the African peer review pilot is growing and it is likely that the LGA will have an opportunity to respond positively to this growing demand. Over the coming months the LGA will be having discussions with a number of development donors and international local government networks about opportunities to continue its development work in Africa.
14. In the meantime, an internal evaluation will be carried out between UCLGA and the LGA of the Africa peer review project and UCLGA will also be commissioning an external evaluator for the project which will form the basis for wider dissemination of the project's achievements as well as the design of future peer review activities.

Financial Implications

15. The Africa peer review project has been entirely externally funded and all expenses incurred by the LGA in the delivery of its activities have been reimbursed, including administration costs. Any continuation of the LGA's international peer review work is reliant on external resources.