



■ In Profile – Ms. Amita Gill – Local Governance Policy Specialist at UNDP



Ms. **Amita Gill** is Local Governance Specialist in the Responsive and Accountable Institutions Team within the Governance and Peacebuilding Cluster, at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as DeLoG’s focal point since 2013/2014. She has over 15 years of experience in managing international development programmes and projects for NGOs, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and UNDP. Over the years she has specialized in issues related to subnational governance, public administration reform, service delivery and decentralisation, with a focus on recovery in fragile and crisis-affected situations. Since 2007 she has been working

for UNDP and after having spent three years in Afghanistan and two years in Somalia, she now serves the UNDP from its headquarters in New York.

Given that UNDP is at the forefront of the “Localising the SDGs” process, Ms. Gill provides an insight into UNDP’s strategic partnership with DeLoG, as well as into UNDP’s strategy on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the local level.

DeLoG: *Ms. Gill, let us first of all thank you for taking your time for this interview!*

Local and Regional Governments are increasingly being recognized as key actors for implementing the 2030 Agenda at the local level. Can you provide us a brief insight on UNDP’s strategy to support local authorities and their associations in “Localising the SDGs”?

In 2015, UNDP, in conjunction with UNCDF and UNV, published an [Integrated Framework to Support Local Governance and Local Development](#) that sets out how we support local authorities, their associations and other local stakeholders.

This framework attempts to pull together an array of perspectives and knowledge on interventions and approaches that anchor the global and national strategies in the realities of the local level. It recognises that local institutions, local economic actors and communities provide legitimacy to global/national efforts by grounding development choices in the will of the people through popular participation and ownership, supporting the process of making the state more responsive, inclusive and accountable.

Subnational governments are the level of government best placed to link the global goals with local communities. Localizing development is then a process to empower all local stakeholders, aimed at making sustainable development more responsive, and therefore, relevant to local needs and aspirations. Development goals can be reached only if local actors fully participate, not only in the implementation, but also in the agenda-setting and monitoring.

Through the framework, UNDP aims to contribute to two outcomes: 1) improve the quality of life for residents; and, 2) build resilient state-society relationships at the local level. Conceptually, the integrated local governance and local development process involves the comprehensive and harmonized provision of six key inputs into the local governance system:

- 1) The facilitation of democratic accountability;
- 2) Strengthening rule of law and security;
- 3) The development of necessary administrative capacity for development management and service delivery;
- 4) The facilitation of necessary fiscal empowerment and resources;



- 5) The availability of spatial information;
- 6) The crucial acceleration of social capital formation.

UNDP is also working with the Global Taskforce on Local and Regional Governments and UN Habitat on setting up a platform or toolbox to bring together resources and experiences to assist local and regional governments and other partners to localize the SDGs (www.localizingthesdgs.org).

This Toolbox has practical, adaptable mechanisms and instruments, which address various development challenges, empower local actors and help them channel global goals into local actions.

The Toolbox seeks to raise awareness of the SDGs among local and national actors. It aims to improve their knowledge of the 2030 Agenda, familiarise them with the implications, opportunities and challenges in localizing it, and urge stakeholders to fully realise their crucial role. As an advocacy platform, it also seeks to create an enabling environment for the localization process, to support local ownership and ensure the SDGs integration in sub-national strategies and plans.

The Toolbox takes stock and reviews existing tools, systematizes outputs and avails the findings to policy-makers, local officers, experts and actors of local relevance. It aims at being a practical support for local stakeholders, by pointing out best practices that are reliable and replicable in order to efficiently design, implement and monitor policies in line with the SDGs.

This toolbox brings tools and experiences together on initializing the SDGs and capacity strengthening as well as tools and experiences for enabling institutional arrangements for SDGs implementation, namely:

- Multilevel governance
- Territorial/ Multi-stakeholder Approaches
- Accountability
- Development Cooperation Effectiveness

At the country level, UNDP has had requests from over 100 governments to support in the implementation of the SDGs looking at the different aspects including localization. UNDP is working with the UN funds and agencies to provide integrated support under the [MAPS \(Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support\)](#) approach.

DeLoG: *This year you have attended your fourth DeLoG Annual Meeting. Why are partnerships important in order to effectively implement the 2030 Agenda at the local level and what is the value-added of a global development partners' network such as DeLoG in this sense?*

The importance of creating multi-stakeholder partnerships for the implementation for Agenda 2030 has been widely acknowledged throughout the process of developing the goals and now during the implementation.

The complexity of today's challenges explains why our 2030 Agenda is ambitious - it addresses not only the social but also the economic, environmental and political dimensions of sustainable development; it charges us to reduce inequalities, improve infrastructure, secure sustainable energy solutions, and promote peaceful and inclusive societies, among others.

Our goal remains centered on "leaving no one behind." In practical terms, "leaving no one behind" requires transformational change at all levels. We need to look beyond the institutions of local governments, to engage all local actors through a territorial approach that includes civil society, traditional leaders, religious organizations, academia, the private sector and others.

To deliver Agenda 2030, we must build on these partnerships. No one can achieve this agenda alone. This means working differently than before. An important condition of success will be the level of interaction and exchange of knowledge between local authorities, allowing to move away from the traditional expert inputs towards a model of decentralized



cooperation that builds on the mutual exchange of expertise between local authorities and local development actors.

Every member of the international development community must internalize this need for cooperation and partnership and global development partner's networks such as DeLoG have a main role to play in promoting the value of partnership and to leverage SDG 17 to achieve all the others.

DeLoG: *Throughout your career as well as during the DeLoG Annual Meeting, you have focused your attention on local governance in fragile and crisis-affected situations. Why do you think that addressing those situations requires local authorities to be part of national and international planning processes?*

Local governance is inherently where the state intersects with the society and the point at which national policies meet local aspirations. The local governance sphere is a crucial focus of intervention to reshape the social contract and make it an engine of peacebuilding, state building and recovery. Basically, we need to support local governance institutions to be able to: extend their pressure and the protection of the state, under a more responsive and inclusive model, to all regions, cities, villages and quarters; building confidence in the political settlement by enabling resource distribution to the local level; direct efforts of the state towards responding to the needs of affected communities in a more inclusive manner; and, address drivers of insecurity and conflict by strengthening social cohesion and supporting local resilience.

The importance of local governance actors and processes in reducing sustainably horizontal inequalities cannot be overstated. In deeply divided societies, a lack of social cohesion or the inability for various groups to agree on how they live together, including governing, negatively affects the relationship of individuals and groups with the state. On the other hand, a lack of coherence of the state in its vision, rules, policies, actions and attitudes to citizens complicates building a trust-based relationship with society. It constrains achieving better development results, hence why local authorities must be part of the national and international planning processes.

Basically, local authorities need to be able to govern well in partnership with informal institutions, civil society and the private sector to build consensus around collective strategies and action plans. They need to ensure the delivery of public services that response to the needs of men and women within the locality.

We outline the experiences of UNDP in supporting local governance in fragile and conflict-affected settings to build a resilient foundation for peace and development in the following [publication](#).

DeLoG: *With regards to your background, what has been your motivation to specialize on decentralisation and local governance-related issues? If you had the choice to go back in time, would you still choose to work in this field?*

This is the easiest question to answer! My interest in local governance and decentralisation comes from a core belief in the declaration of human rights including equality and the rights to an adequate living standard. Local governance actors play a key role in the delivery of these and are really our interlocutors to our government.

I would still choose to work in the field of local governance. I have been lucky enough to be able to speak to Masters students in my current capacity as well as work with excellent junior staff members, I always emphasize how interesting this field of work is. It is the part of governance that matters to the majority of people. Local governance is not about 'where' or 'who' but 'how' it is done and working at the local level means the 'how' is different in each locality. This means the work is very varied and challenging. Having had the privilege of working with many local authority official or representatives, I have always been impressed by their dedication even within the most difficult of circumstances.