



■ In Profile – Christel Alvergne, UN Capital Development Fund



Christel Alvergne is regional advisor and regional coordinator at the UNCDF (United Nations Capital Development Fund) regional office in Dakar. Former academic, she holds a PhD in Economics and has worked for 20 years on local development and decentralisation. She has been researcher and professor in different universities and academic institutions in France, Canada, Senegal and Egypt. She has been advisor for the French prime minister agency – DATAR – on territorial development and forecast policies in France for 3 years.

Since many years she is involved in the municipal movement in developing countries and has supported decentralisation processes since their beginning in the 90's. At the UNCDF she is in charge with local development finance programmes in the African countries and works in the field of climate change, food security, local economic development and women economic empowerment.

Dear Christel, let us first of all thank you for taking your time for this interview! We highly appreciate your support and cooperation throughout the past years as an active member of the DeLoG Network. What have been your highlights of this cooperation and what benefits of being a DeLoG member could you name?

I think that the DeLoG Network has been created on purpose to really try to help the different actors and donors in the field of decentralisation to be more coordinated or at least to be more aware of what each of us are doing. Everything, from the information about decentralisation and local governance that the network is producing, to the website as well as the trainings, the annual meeting, the newsletter, the publications, all of that I think is great and a good way to give both visibility as well as possibility to exchange and build together in this field. To me, all of that was very useful, because it provided a lot of information on what is going on and on what the different positions from the partners and the different discussions and debates are. What is also interesting is that you get a lot of information from the website and from the newsletter regarding the last developments and the last implementations that have been done. I like the fact that DeLoG does both, a lot of information providing through the website and the different communication networks but there is also the possibility to be able to exchange even informally between the different actors, especially during the DeLoG annual meeting. Being able to organise together some conferences or side-events, being present and giving some visibility on what we are doing in those conferences was for me one of the greatest highlights of being a DeLoG member.

Has your participation in the DeLoG network had an impact on UNCDF's approaches and policies regarding the importance and relevance of DLG? Which DeLoG activities were especially relevant in this regard?

To me, the most interesting part of DeLoG and the most relevant was the annual meeting. It was a time where you can devote two or three days and engage with different partners on different topics. To look at what the main tendencies are, what the "fashion" is in the support of decentralisation and local governance and to be able to exchange, that was very helpful. Being in this annual meeting and being able to interact with different players in this field helped a lot in understanding what the last developments are or what the position for example to Enabel, the EU or to UN-Habitat is. To me, because of the position that I am in, that was the most helpful part of DeLoG. But of course all of this



depends on the position you have; maybe for a project manager in a different country, or an academic in another country, knowing what is going on, so the website, is more useful.

What do you see as the main challenges for effective decentralisation and local governance in Western and Central Africa?

One of the challenges right now is a fatigue on decentralisation. 30 years ago, when we started with that, everybody was very excited; it was a new topic, a new objective for many countries. The fact that it was new and a new way to think was very exciting. The development was exciting. 30 years after, some donors and even some countries think that we should stop and maybe find new ways to deliver on the basic services etc. I think the main challenge is to innovate and to show that decentralisation is still very relevant and local governance is still something that needs to be addressed, but maybe we need to change a little bit the conversation and the way we are supporting decentralisation. Decentralisation is even more important right now because of the demographic growth. The population is doubling every 25 years so this is enormous compared to the 90's or even the 60's. Therefore, there is a big challenge for all the local municipalities and for the cities to be able to help to deliver basic services, like local economic development or to be able to deliver on the SDGs of course, to provide health, education etc. It is still very relevant to give responsibilities to the cities and to the municipalities, that still needs to be done but we need to engage in different ways with the countries, with the municipalities and with the regional institutions. It means that we need to develop new instruments to be more innovative in the way we are engaging with the municipalities and we need to develop new ways to finance municipalities and their development.

From your point of view, which role will decentralisation and democratic local governance play in the local economic development and inclusive finance? What have been cases worth mentioning in this regard in your experience at the UNCDF?

Actually, the role of the municipalities and the role of decentralisation is really to create trust and local dynamics and to be more concrete for the municipalities. They have the responsibility for their own local development, to put in place, to help and to enable the entrepreneurs for them to be able to do business on the ground; this is the basic of local economic development. For example: putting in place basic infrastructure, being able to be responsible and to deliver in health, education as well as finding new ways to finance economic infrastructure, markets and bus stations for the local entrepreneurs, to be able to make money, to create jobs and to develop activities and then of course for them to pay their own taxes to increase the budget of the municipalities. There is a circle that has to be created on the local level and that is the main role of decentralisation and the main challenge, too.

Over the last years, DeLoG has had a close and intensive cooperation with the UNCDF. Where do you see opportunities to continue and deepen this cooperation?

The UNCDF is more focused on finance, which is why I was pushing DeLoG to move into this area, while most of the partners are in capacity building, institutional capacity building, policy framework etc. I think that we had very interesting discussions in that area with DeLoG. I also think that the partnership is on track and it should continue in the same ways, but maybe we could also think about opportunities that are more concrete, for instance could DeLoG play a role of convening some partners to apply for different calls for proposals or design programmes together; maybe that could be an option.

Which emerging topics do you see for the work of the UNCDF in 2019 and what does your future involvement look like?



We are really looking at new ways to develop investment for municipalities. We are trying to move ahead from these initial conversations between the ministries of decentralisation, finance and the local authorities, to help municipalities to be able to access new sources of finance. We are now creating a new fund, the 'International Municipal Investment Fund'. In terms of the DeLoG Network, we could have a conversation about what could be some investment coming from different actors from the DeLoG Network and maybe find out if there are some private initiatives that could be funded by this new investment fund.

The next DeLoG Annual Meeting will take place in May. What ideas would you like to see emerge and what advice would you give to participants and to the DeLoG Secretariat for this year's meeting?

A good idea would maybe be to have sort of a "pipeline" developed by the DeLoG Network and funded by the IMF. Another one would be to invite some guests, or speakers to develop the think tank role of DeLoG in trying to reach new frontiers and new ways of thinking about local development and decentralisation. Being able to innovate and maybe focus a little bit more on innovation because this is where you learn from the different experiences from different partners. I think it would be very interesting to look at the stimulation of innovation.

