



■ In Profile – Lea Flaspöehler, former advisor at the DeLoG Secretariat



Lea Flaspöehler is former advisor at the DeLoG Secretariat. Following various internships in GIZ Programmes, she took up the position in 2015. As DeLoG advisor, her main tasks included the preparation of technical assessments and briefings for DeLoG on Localising the SDGs, DLG in Fragile Contexts and Fiscal

Decentralisation and the organisation and provision of DeLoG learning events and courses. Lea left her position recently. She is now managing the GIZ project 'Strengthening Local Governance and Resilience in South-Sudan'. In this interview, Lea Flaspöehler provides an insight into her experiences, motivation and wishes for the DeLoG-Network and tells us about her new professional adventure.

Lea, thank you very much for taking time for this interview! First, there is a reason why we are conducting this interview with you. After holding your position as DeLoG advisor for three years, you have taken the decision to move on to new tasks and paths. What was your initial motivation to be part of the DeLoG Secretariat?

Thanks a lot for the opportunity of this interview. I actually started to work for DeLoG as an intern in 2012. I had just come back from a study year abroad in Vancouver, Canada, where I had taken several classes on federalism in Canada, as well as decentralisation in the developing world. This made me curious to learn more about decentralisation and local governance (DLG), as it was also a highly debated concept and approach. What was interesting about the DeLoG-Network at that time was its commitment to contribute to more harmonisation and development effectiveness and its composition of bi- and multilateral development organisations as well as other partners such as global or regional associations of local governments and authorities.

The passion for the topic, being convinced that development cannot take place without engaging the local level, brought me back to the DeLoG Secretariat in 2015, when I started to work as an advisor. I remember that by that time I was impressed to see that the topic of 'Localising the SDGs' was debated on various levels and within a number of organisations and that subnational contexts were seen as crucial in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, not only in implementing but also in measuring progress and monitoring the 2030 Agenda - especially since DeLoG and partner organisations were one of the first once to discuss the topic of 'Localising the SDGs' already in 2012, for example at Africities Conference in Dakar.

In summary, I think it was the combination of thematic work and insight on DLG and the structure of the network as such with a wealth of knowledge and the opportunity to actually contribute to the international development agenda that motivated me throughout the years.



What did you particularly appreciate about the work at the Secretariat?

Definitely the variety of topics and the dedicated and motivated people behind the organisations! The informality of DeLoG made working for the Secretariat sometimes very challenging, as getting engaged in DeLoG meant additional work for DeLoG's focal points. At the same time, it allowed for open and enriching discussions, as individual members were given a space to think out of the box, learn from each other and getting some distance with regard to their daily routines - and oftentimes organisational silos.

What drove the network was the variety of members and partners and the huge networks linked to them. I participated in no less than five DeLoG Annual Meetings and for each meeting, new experts as well as partners from the field were suggested to participate and contributed by bringing up new topics and perspectives.

The exchange with the core funders, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) was highly appreciated from the Secretariat and became even more 'institutionalised' in 2017, when the Strategic Support Group, made up of BMZ and SDC as well as the former and current host of the annual meeting and one voluntary member, was established and a DeLoG Charta was adopted. The Strategic Support Group provided guidance and shaped DeLoG's agenda for the last 2 years.

In the years as DeLoG advisor, what were major highlights of your work and for the DeLoGNetwork?

There were many - but one highlight each year was the Annual Meeting. Each Annual Meeting was unique and shaped by the hosts interests as well as latest trends in the field of DLG. And it was that one time of the year when DeLoG focal points met in person and spent 2-3 days together, exchanging and updating on latest approaches and focus areas of their organisations, critically assessing and observing latest trends and activities in the area of DLG, providing guidance to the Secretariat and shaping the mission and strategic outlook of the network. It was one of the few institutionalised parts of the DeLoG-Network and I was always impressed by the dynamics during the meetings. The topics changed over the years and while Localising the SDGs and Fiscal Decentralisation and Local Finance were the main themes in 2015 and 2016, the Annual Meetings in 2017 and 2018 put the topic of DLG in fragile contexts high on the agenda.

Another highlight was the capacity development programme of the DeLoG-Network in general and two courses in specific. In 2016, the regional seminar on 'The Implementation of the Whitebook on Financial Decentralisation within UEMOA' took place in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. It was jointly organised by the Council of Local Government Associations (CCT) of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), DeLoG and the Global Fund for Cities Development (FMDV), supported by France (French Ministry of Foreign



Affairs), Germany (GIZ) and Switzerland (DEZA/SDC) and discussed opportunities for advancing the process of financial decentralisation in the UEMOA region – taking account of a Whitebook that had been developed in 2014 which foresaw the gradual increase of intergovernmental transfers to local authorities of up to 20% of the national budget. What was impressive about the event was on one hand the joint effort of various DeLoG member organisations to initiate such an event and the high degree of donor cooperation, which continued even once the event had been conducted. On the other hand DeLoG played a crucial role in bringing together for the first time key stakeholders and development partners in the region to discuss the way forward for a successful decentralisation process towards greater fiscal autonomy at the local level.

Another course highlight was the tutored e-learning course on DLG that has been conducted once or even twice a year since 2013 with the number of applicants exceeding the number of spaces available by far every single time. The outcome and depth of the facilitated discussions as well as the positive feedback of the participants made it a very fulfilling experience.

One of your main responsibilities has been the Learn4Dev component. Could you explain what the DeLoG/Learn4Dev Capacity Development Programme is and what was the most exciting part about it?

In 2011, DeLoG became part of the Learn4Dev network, a network of bi- and multilateral organisations exchanging on learning methodologies and working together to provide better learning opportunities for development organisations' staff and partners. By that time, DeLoG developed a generic course on decentralisation and local governance which could be tailored to specific interests and needs, topics, and country as well as regional contexts. Since 2011, DeLoG has conducted over 20 learning events. All learning events were hosted and supported by DeLoG member organisations and conducted around the World: Regional learning events took place in Cameroon, Burkina Faso and the Philippines, in-country courses in Albania and Benin.

In the last 2 years, courses were conducted in Brussels discussing DLG in fragile contexts and as part of a broader peace agenda – taking account of the reality that the number of programmes on DLG implemented in fragile and conflict affected settings is increasing.

And of course, not to forget and as mentioned before the tutored e-learning course, which has created an overwhelming demand to the point that we decided to conduct even two courses per year.

I always enjoyed developing ideas for future courses, starting with getting some of DeLoG member organisations engaged and shape the common agenda of the courses. From my point of view, DeLoG's capacity development programme is one of the most successful achievements of the DeLoG-Network as the way the programme was designed allowed for a lot of flexibility and addressed the needs of a large group of DeLoG member and partner organisations staff as well as partners.



Where do you see DeLoG's future and what are your wishes for the DeLoG-Network?

DeLoG has a great potential and has taken many efforts over the last years to strengthen its institutional set up and work together towards common objectives. I hope that DeLoG will be able to continue working on the topics of Localising the SDGs, DLG in fragile contexts, Fiscal Decentralisation and local finance and urban and territorial governance; or decide on new topics to jointly work on. The strengths of the network is its heterogeneous set up but at the same time, joint interest to define and advocate for political, legal and fiscal frameworks that allow for local development to take place.

DeLoG will hopefully be able to continue conducting its capacity development programme and use upcoming international conferences and events to hold up its role of advocating for DLG.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the DeLoG-Network, its members and also the Secretariat for the exciting and great cooperation and learning environment. My wish for the network is to continue to develop interesting activities that shape the future of DLG and create space for development partners and organisations to discuss and exchange. DeLoG provides the space for out of the box thinking and discussing, an opportunity members and partners might rarely have without specifically this informal network, and of course, an opportunity for the DeLoG-Network and Secretariat to continue beyond the current phase that ends in September 2020.

You are now managing the project 'Strengthening Local Governance and Resilience in South-Sudan'. How would you say working for the Secretariat prepared you for this position and where do you see intersections between working on DLG for the network and your current project?

Well, all of you know that once you take up a new position in a new project you are immediately drawn into the work and environment of the new project and it takes a while to reflect on how much knowledge and competencies you already have that you can use in your new job. I have to admit that working in the Secretariat of the DeLoG-Network actually prepared me quite well.

First of all as mentioned before, I took part and organised the learning event on Local Governance and Sustaining Peace, where I got a lot of theoretical and practical insight into challenges, questions and projects working in conflict affected areas and settings. Transforming local governance and supporting local development and local structures is essential, and this is what the project that I am currently working in is focusing on.

DeLoG also taught me a lot about power dynamics, within organisations as well as government systems, which is very helpful to understand the context of my working environment.

We would like to thank you for all your dedication and work for DeLoG and you will surely be missed. All the best for your future.

