

# EU-Africa strategy: A way out of poverty?

The Good Governance Learning Network (GGLN) is a loose network of South African NGOs that focuses on promoting good local governance. It is funded by the Ford Foundation and supported by other funding partners such as the Charles Stewart-Mott Foundation and the Open Society Foundation for South Africa. It is coordinated by the Foundation for Contemporary Research (FCR) and is the host network of the Southern Africa regional chapter of the international LogoLink network.

More than 290 participants from 40 states across Europe and Africa, representing civil society actors, research institutions, parliaments, ministries and governmental institutions, came together in Vienna on 22/23 of June 2006 at Sound of Africa, an international conference, to discuss the content of the new EU-Africa Strategy. It was organised by the Austrian EU-Platform of NGOs to mark the Austrian presidency of the EU.

The GGLN was invited to send a representative to this conference after conducting a preparatory seminar. The seminar was held on 22 May 2006 and the Community Law Centre's senior researcher and coordinator of the Local Government Project, Dr Jaap de Visser, represented the GGLN in Vienna. The GGLN urged the EU to consider the protection and promotion of local government a central pillar of its developmental donor strategy. It believes that local government is a governance institution that is not only critical in achieving development, but is also undervalued in its role and contribution towards achieving development.

In its submission, the GGLN responded to African initiatives on (local) governance, most notably NEPAD and the African Peer Review Mechanism, but also developments in South Africa. It submitted that there is a growing momentum in Africa around enhancing the role of local government in development. Local government, often overlooked or undervalued, is becoming a key driver in developing Africa. This growing consensus is found at the highest levels. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the UN, has said that "70% of the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved primarily through local governments working in consultation with NGOs and national

stakeholders". Initiatives such as the establishment of the United Cities and Local Government of Africa (UCLGA), the AfriCities summits and the establishment of a SADC Local Government desk bear testimony to the growing importance of local government.

The GGLN submitted that the governance chapter of the EU's strategy for Africa should reflect this growing momentum for local government in Africa. When, for example, the EU resolves to "Support good governance programmes at country level and help build the capacity of the African Union and Africa's regional and national institutions," the need for supporting the capacity of regional and local governments (through national institutions or directly) should not be overlooked.

The GGLN's message found its way into the 'Vienna Declaration', which was presented by the Conference to a representative of the EU Presidency. The declaration and a conference report can be downloaded from [www.reichearmewelt.at](http://www.reichearmewelt.at).



Dr Jaap de Visser at the International Sound of Africa Conference