

UK local authorities and international development

2004 survey results analysis

By Rosalie Callway





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Globalisation affects the communities we live in. Whilst local authorities focus on supporting the needs of those communities, they are also playing an increasingly greater role on the world stage through trade, tourism and investment.

Like the UK Local Government Alliance for International Development, many councils know that international development is about more than simply helping poor communities in developing countries. It's also about recognising the links to challenges on our doorsteps.

This booklet sets out the results of a 2004 survey of UK local authorities and their involvement in international development activities. It gives an indication of the level of interest in international work and sets out why councils get involved in projects and partnerships in the developing world. It also highlights the issues that are holding local authorities back from greater involvement internationally.

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This survey has been conducted by the UK Local Government Alliance for International Development as part of its work with the Government's Department for International Development. The findings will help inform the further work of the Alliance in promoting the importance of international development to local government and local communities across the UK.

We would like to thank all the authorities that responded to the survey.

England

Arun District Council
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council
Birmingham City Council
Blackburn and Darwen Borough Council
Bournemouth Borough Council
Bradford Metropolitan Borough Council
Bristol City Council
Chelmsford Borough Council
Chesterfield Borough Council
Congleton Borough Council
Cornwall County Council
East Dorset District Council
East Staffordshire Borough Council
Essex County Council
Exeter City Council
Forest Heath District Council
Gosport Borough Council
Ipswich Borough Council
London Borough of Greenwich
Newark and Sherwood District Council
Newport City Council
North Yorkshire County Council
Norwich City Council
Nottingham County Council
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
South Derbyshire District Council
South Northamptonshire Council
Southampton City Council
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Sunderland City Council
Swindon Borough Council
Tandridge District Council
Watford Borough Council
West Berkshire Council
West Lancashire
Wolverhampton City Council
Wyre Forest District Council

Northern Ireland

Armagh City and District Council
Ballymena Borough Council
Banbridge District Council
Belfast City Council
Coleraine Borough Council
Cookstown District Council
Derry County Council
Down District Council
Fermanagh District Council
Newry and Mourne District Council
North Down Borough Council
Omagh District Council

Scotland

Aberdeen City Council
Aberdeenshire Council
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Dundee City Council
East Ayrshire Council
East Dunbartonshire Council
East Lothian Council
Falkirk Council
Glasgow City Council
Midlothian Council
Perth and Kinross Council
Scottish Borders Council
South Ayrshire Council
Stirling Council
West Dunbartonshire Council

Wales

Bridgend County Borough Council
Pembrokeshire County Council
Swansea, City and County
Welsh Local Government Association

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Edited by Graham Welch

Design by Banana Design

Printed by



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Background

In the first half of 2004, a survey was carried out of local authorities across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to examine the current level of involvement in international development activities. The survey was conducted by the UK Local Government Alliance for International Development, or the Alliance for short.

The Alliance consists of five national local government bodies involved in international development activities: the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), the Local Government International Bureau (LGIB) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE).

The aim of the alliance is to "promote local government and local community participation in international development through providing tools and resources to help local authorities become more actively involved".

The survey is the first major activity that the Alliance has carried out as part of its new

strategic partnership with the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The aim of the survey is to provide information about how many and to what degree local authorities in the UK are currently involved in international development activities. This can include actual overseas partnerships and work with developing countries as well as local community activities in the UK that have a development focus, such as global learning and virtual exchanges. It also seeks to assess how many authorities are not involved in such activities, to gain a better understanding of the factors that are preventing authorities from doing so.

The results provide a baseline, against which future surveys can measure changes in the level of local authority international development.

The findings will help inform the future work of the Alliance and will help ensure that resources are better targeted towards the identified needs and priorities of local authorities. The results will also be valuable to help the Alliance make recommendations to DFID about how central government can further support such activities.

Daventry has worked with Iganga in Uganda to improve street drainage. The Alliance hopes to boost other local authorities' international development work



Summary of results

The survey results provide a valuable insight into local authorities' interest and involvement in international development work.

International development is important

Over two thirds (68%) of authorities that replied said international development is an important area of work.

Domestic benefits

Almost nine in ten (87%) indicated they think there is a cultural benefit to international activities. Economic and business opportunities were also identified as a key benefit by 81% of respondents.

Some international action

Nearly two in five (37%) said that they are involved in some form of activity with a local authority or community group in a developing country.

Asian interest

There is a strong interest in international links with Asia, with 25% of authorities citing a link in the region - most commonly with authorities in China.

Level of response

Approximately 16% of local authorities in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales responded to the survey.

Lack of international thinking

Nearly three in ten (29%) of respondents are aware of the Local Government Association's policy on international development, and 36% have their own international policy or strategy.

Low international awareness

Over half (55%) of local authorities said that they had never heard of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

More support needed

Sixty percent of authorities fund their own international work, and 87% asked for support and information about funding opportunities.

General recommendations

Policy and strategy

- The Local Government Association international development policy (2002) and the Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993 need to be promoted to local authorities; and
- Greater support is required to assist developing international policies and programmes in individual local authorities.

Practice

- Local community involvement in establishing overseas partnerships should be encouraged;
- Better targeted information is needed regarding funding opportunities, as well as more funding; and
- Setting up and facilitating networks for exchanging good practice is required.

Raising awareness

- Information resources need to be improved, especially online information, with case studies etc;
- More authorities need to be encouraged to do global development education activities; and
- Development Education Centres should be promoted more effectively to local authorities, to support local efforts to raise awareness of global issues.

Local learning

Nearly half (48%) said they are involved in global education activities locally. However, 40% did not know whether there was a Development Education Centre in their area.

Interest in the future involvement

Three quarters of respondents said they are interested in getting involved in activities in the future.

Survey results

Level of response

A total of 76 local authorities in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales responded to the survey, which is about 16% of the total number of authorities¹. Forty four councils responded from England, twelve from Northern Ireland, 16 from Scotland and four from Wales.

There may be a number of reasons for this fairly low response rate. It may be indicative of the level of local authority interest in international development. Other possible factors are discussed in the concluding section. However, this is still a sufficient level of response to allow us look at the type and level of interaction with developing countries.

Various types of authorities responded to the survey. The highest proportion came from unitary councils, then metropolitan councils, followed by district and county councils.

¹ In the UK, there are a total of 468 local authorities: 34 county councils, 36 metropolitan district councils, 47 English unitary authorities, 33 London authorities, 238 shire district councils, 32 Scottish councils, 26 Northern Ireland unitary district councils and 22 Welsh unitary authorities.

Awareness and significance

The LGA International Development Policy 2002 and Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993

In total 29% of respondents had heard of the Local Government Association's policy on international development. The policy seeks to encourage local authorities to consider having a member of staff dedicated to international activities. However, the policy only refers to members in England and Wales, not Northern Ireland and Scotland. A greater proportion of councils from England and Wales, 39%, have heard of the policy but this figure still implies that more than half of the respondents do not know it exists.

Even fewer councils were aware of the Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act and amendments. Only 19% of respondents had heard of it.

This 1993 Act enables local authorities to provide advice and assistance to counterparts overseas on local government "in which they have skill and experience". It does not allow authorities to provide financial assistance. However, a later measure, the Local Authorities (Charges for Overseas Assistance and Public Path Orders) Regulations 1996, allows councils to charge for providing advice or assistance overseas.

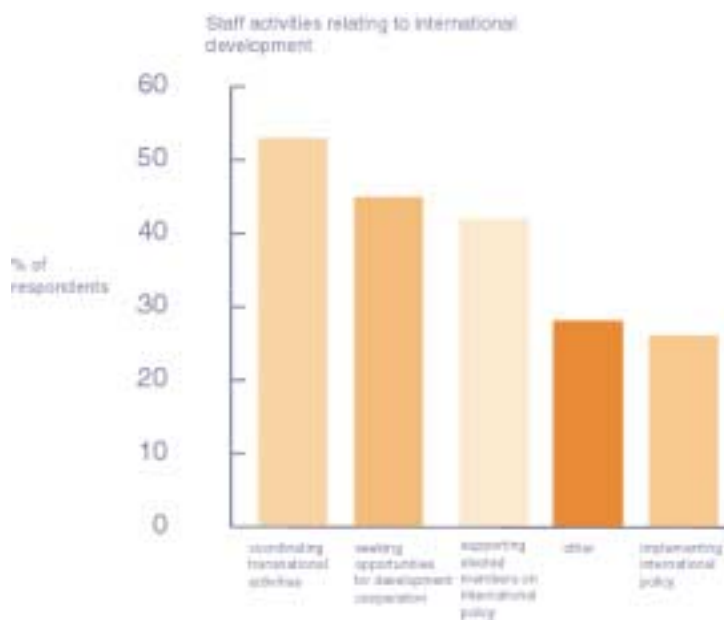
International policy/strategy

A larger proportion, 36% of respondents, indicated that they are developing or have in place an international policy or strategy. A number also indicated that they have a European strategy in place. One authority also has an international education policy.

Staff resources

In terms of staffing, the largest proportion of respondents (53%) have an officer that deals with international issues as part of their work. Nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents have a dedicated officer who focuses solely on issues of international policy and cooperation.

However, 29% of councils do not have anyone who deals with such issues.



Staff activities

The main areas of work for over half of the respondents (52%) is in coordinating overseas partnerships and international policy work, whether on a part time or full time basis.

Other areas of international work include:

- coordinating town twinning programmes;
- researching and promoting funding programmes;
- examining business and trade opportunities, as well as strategic economic alliances;
- supporting Local Democracy Agencies in Eastern Europe;
- arranging and hosting international visits; and
- supporting voluntary and community organisations in international activities.

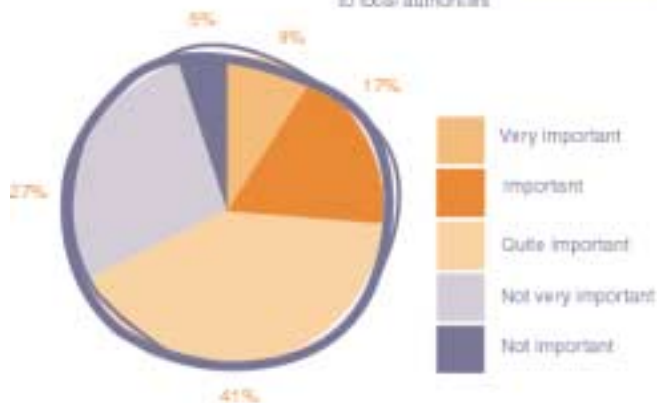
Two authorities, Birmingham and Glasgow, have an international office or team (with five and eight staff respectively) that are responsible for coordinating all the European and international activities within the council.

The importance of international development for local authorities

Nearly seven in ten councils (68%) said that they find international development to be between 'quite' and 'very' important. The largest proportion said it was 'quite important' (41%) to them. This suggests that whilst it is not the number one priority for many authorities, it is an area that they recognise as valuable.

It can also be argued that as respondents represent about a sixth of all local authorities in the UK, the response rate itself may be an indication of the importance councils attach to international development.

The importance of international development to local authorities



How do authorities find out about international development issues?

The Internet is by far the most popular form of media for obtaining information about international development. Nearly half of respondents referred to it. Other popular sources include information exchanged through European, national and regional networks, as well as through publications from the European Commission, DFID, the LGIB and the Local Government Association.

Preferred sources of information

Type	%
Internet and e-lists	45%
Networks and associations	36%
Publications	33%
TV, newspapers, radio	20%
Workshops/seminars	5%
Personal contacts	4%

“Overseas development is not considered by the council as part of our overall strategy - our focus has primarily been on local development”

Awareness of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals

Over half (55%) of the councils which responded have never heard of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as compared to 36% which do recognise them. However, only 12% of respondents feel they have a good understanding of what all the MDGs are. Of those authorities that had heard of them, they had found about them in newspapers, local government publications, the Internet and from DFID sources.

Partnerships

Involvement with developing countries

Over a third of respondents (37%) said that they are involved in some form of international cooperation with a local authority or community group in a developing country. Many also referred to partnerships in Eastern Europe and the developed world (65% of respondents).

Of those who did not have a link with a developing country, a lack of resources was cited the greatest perceived obstacle. As one respondent put it, "We are a small unitary authority with resources only to deal with statutory responsibilities and local issues." A lack of staffing and capacity were also noted as major constraints.

Another council indicated that it would consider getting more involved if money were available from central government. Others said that they had tried to establish partnerships but they had not progressed because of a lack of support in terms of networks, information and guidance on good practice.

One respondent commented that the council was sensitive to public perception of junkets and freebies for councillors and mayors.

A number of councils noted that such partnerships are simply not a priority. One said, "Overseas development is not considered by the council as part of our overall strategy - our focus has primarily been on local development."

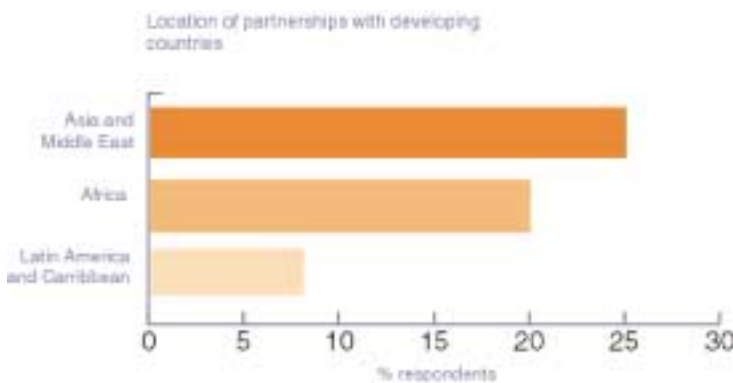
Of those who did have partnerships with developing countries, the following information was obtained about the structure of the partnerships.

Where in the world?

In terms of the proportion of partnerships established in different parts of the developing world, the largest proportion of links is with Asian countries. A quarter of respondents have an Asian link. Another 20% of respondents have a link in Africa and 7% have a link in Latin America.

More than one in five authorities (21%) has a link in China, making it by far the most popular country for cooperation. The second most popular country was South Africa, with 8% citing a link.

The Local Government International Bureau reports that there are UK local authorities with links in other countries, but the countries referred to here are those cited by respondents to the survey.



Why does an authority get involved in a partnership?

There are three principal reasons why UK local authorities have become involved in international partnerships. The largest proportion of respondents (25%) indicated that the partnership was due to an EU funded programme, such as Asia Urbs. The second most common reason was through a request by a local community group (17%). A personal link (of a local authority councillor or officer) with a particular country was also a popular reason for establishing a partnership. Maintaining historical and cultural ties through twinning links was cited.

Other partnerships were established as a result of a request from an overseas authority, while seeking economic opportunities was also identified as a reason.

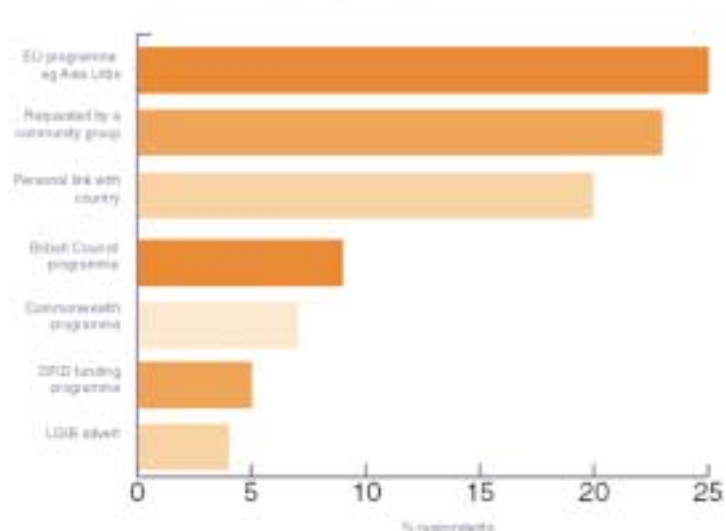
Funding

In the main, partnerships are funded directly by a local authority. Nearly two thirds of respondents (60%) backed links in this way, although other sources of funding often supplement a council's input.

The European Commission and other European bodies, such as the Council of Europe, were the second most typical funding route (29% of respondents). Small numbers of authorities indicated that they had also received funding from the British Council, DFID or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Although not listed in the survey, a few authorities indicated they had been funded by the Commonwealth and associated bodies, such as the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. Others had received support from voluntary organisations, other governments (such as the United States government), the United Nations, the Department of Trade and Industry and the private sector.

Reasons for establishing an international link



One council has adopted an alternative model to funding a partnership itself by establishing a charitable body to lead the fund raising process. Coleraine Borough Council in Northern Ireland started the Zomba Action Project (ZAP) for its link with Zomba in Malawi. The charity raised £40,000 in its first year. Council staff and councillors contribute their time on a voluntary basis.

UK local authority links

Africa

Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe

Latin America and the Caribbean

Brazil, Cuba, Jamaica, Nicaragua

Asia (including the Middle East)

Bangladesh, China, India, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Vietnam

Types of partnerships

Town twinning was the most common type of link. Nearly half of respondents cited this (49%), followed jointly by links which focus on economic development and cultural exchange (45% each). Also popular were education links and good practice exchanges.

A number of authorities cited tourism and regeneration links, involvement in networks and sporting links, as well as partnerships involving humanitarian and development assistance. Other types of links were more unusual, such as the London Borough of Greenwich's involvement in the TEMA Link, involving partner authorities along the Meridian line.

Perceived benefits

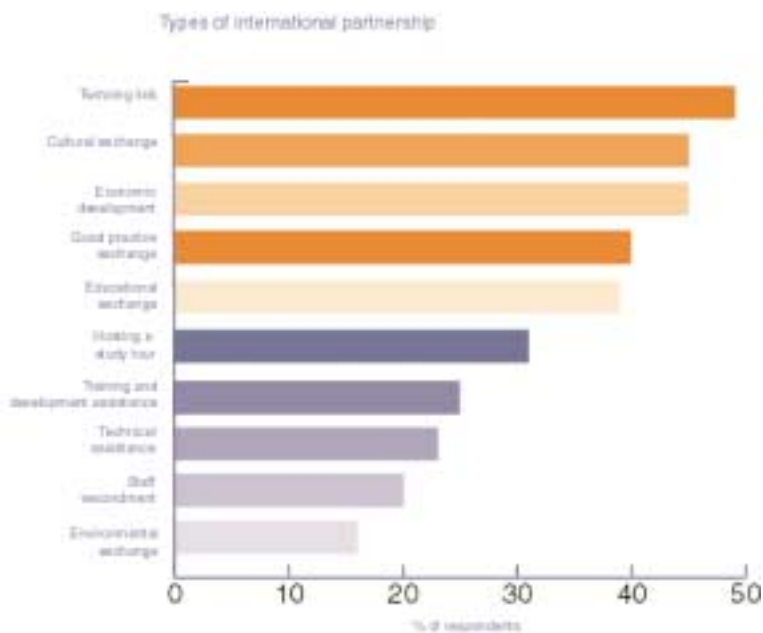
The survey asked about the possible benefits that might result from international cooperation. The greatest number of respondents thought cultural exchange was a benefit (87%). This was followed by economic and business opportunities, where 81% of respondents thought international cooperation could bring advantages.

Improving service delivery and solving problems by sharing experience, as well as global learning and tolerance, were cited as benefits by 75% of authorities. Enhancing youth activities and local authority professional development and training were also potential benefits, according to 71% and 65% of respondents respectively.

Other perceived benefits cited were community cohesion, technical benefits, the promotion of community partnerships and civil society, improving social welfare and staff retention.

Swansea pointed out that partnerships help "share best practice and experience and develop new ideas for action". It also said that partnerships can support education requirements since "the curriculum requires children to have links with peers overseas and have an active citizenship focus".

Coleraine said, "International cooperation can bring the community together and helps us learn about the developing world needs. We can help improve the social welfare and health of the people in our partner cities. Town twinning links promote cultural exchange and economic development by furthering our business and economic opportunities."



Encouraging authorities to get involved

When asked what would encourage local authorities to get more involved in international cooperation, the greatest proportion of authorities (87% of respondents) asked for further information and guidance on the funding that is available.

Also important were support for developing international policy and programmes (71% of respondents) and opportunities for networking and exchange (also 71%), as well as information resources, such as websites, guides, good practice case studies and issue briefings (69%).

Respondents were invited to suggest other factors that would encourage them. The greatest number called for further funding to be made available. They asked the Government to make further funds more accessible, including to communities. One asked for more coordinated support especially to help with the initial phases of a project. It was also suggested that the domestic benefits of international cooperation need to be demonstrated with real examples.

Education and learning

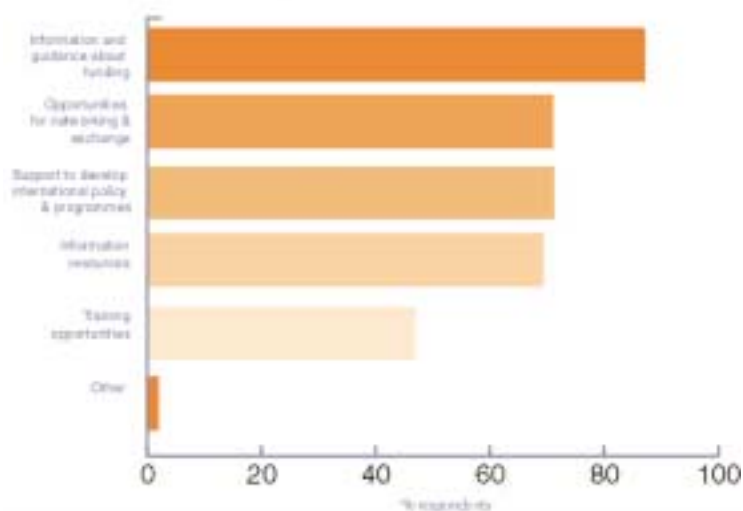
Education and awareness raising

Nearly half (48%) of respondents said that their authority was involved in global education/awareness raising activities. This left some 39% who didn't think there was any activity and 13% of respondents who didn't know.

Development Education Centres

Development Education Centres are independent local centres across the UK which support teachers, youth workers, community educators, higher education

How to encourage local authorities to get more involved in international development activities



institutions and students in learning about global and sustainable development issues and how to 'think globally and act locally'. Only 11% thought there was a Centre in their area. Nearly half of the respondents didn't think there was one and another 40% didn't know. Only two authorities indicated they give financial support to their Centre.

Further information is available online at the Development Education Association website: <http://www.dea.org.uk>

Follow up

Three quarters of respondents said that they are interested in getting involved in future research and activities relating to international development.

“Although the actual numbers are small, there has been a fourfold increase in the number of links with Asia and Africa”

Comparison to 1997 survey

The Local Government Management Board conducted a similar survey of local authorities in England and Wales in 1997. It received responses from 270 authorities, in comparison to 46 authorities from England and Wales in this survey. Unlike this survey, which takes a special focus on activities in relation to developing countries, the 1997 survey examined both European and international activities. There is a higher level of involvement in work at a European level. In addition, the Alliance survey also addresses authorities in Northern Ireland and Scotland. Therefore, it is not possible to make a direct comparison between the two surveys.

However, it is still interesting and potentially useful to compare some of the results.

The low level of response in 2004 may itself be an indicator of the current level of interest in international development. It may also be due to other factors, such as consultation fatigue - this survey would almost certainly have been just one of a number conducted at the time.

In addition, it is possible that the survey did not reach the relevant officers or councillors. International activities can involve very different officers and departments depending on the local authority in question. For example, the links can be managed by economic development, education, environment or regeneration departments.

It is also possible that the lower response rate is the result of the survey's focus on work with developing countries - the 1997 survey looked at European activities as well. In contrast, it would appear that a higher proportion of local authorities now have international strategies in place (although the 1997 survey did indicate another 23% of authorities were developing strategies).

The comparison suggests that there is an interesting development in terms of the number and proportion of authorities with links in Asia and Africa. Although the actual numbers are small, there has been a fourfold increase in the number of links with these regions.

More local authorities are finding the resources to fund international development work than before



Comparison of surveys in 1997 and 2004

Issue	1997	2004
Staff	30% of respondents (54 authorities) had dedicated officers working on European and international issues 58% (230 authorities) had an officer who partly worked on international and European issues	22% of respondents (17 authorities) have dedicated officers working on international issues (European dimension not included) 53% (40 authorities) have an officer who partly works on international issues
Strategies	21% of respondents (57 authorities) had a European and/or international strategy	36% of respondents (27 authorities) have an international strategy
Regions	5 authorities had links in Asia 4 authorities had links in Africa	19 authorities have links in Asia 15 authorities have links in Africa
Funding	75% of respondents' links (203 authorities) were funded by EU programmes 16.5% (45 authorities) of links were funded by authorities themselves	29% of respondents' links (22 authorities) are funded by EU programmes 60% (45 authorities) of links are funded by authorities themselves
Activities	26% of respondents (70 authorities) were involved in economic development cooperation 20% (54 authorities) were involved in cultural exchanges 15% (41 authorities) were involved in training and development 14% (38 authorities) were involved in exchanging good practice	45% of respondents (34 authorities) are involved in economic development cooperation 45% (34 authorities) are involved in cultural exchanges 23% (17 authorities) are involved in training and development 40% (30 authorities) were involved in exchanging good practice

Similarly, it appears that local authorities have become more reliant on their own funds in 2004 as opposed to European Union sources of funding. However, this may relate more to the fact that there is more EU funding available for European partnerships which were also assessed in the 1997 survey. It is worth noting that the availability of EU funding was identified as an important factor for initiating a partnership in the 2004 survey.

In terms of the types of activities, there appears to be a larger proportion of authorities involved in economic development activities and cultural exchanges. In addition, there is a greater involvement in good practice exchanges than in 1997.

Conclusion

Recommendations

The survey gives a clear indication that the local authorities that replied to the survey are keen to get more involved in international development activities. It also highlights a number of areas where authorities need greater support.

The following issues particularly stand out:

Policy and strategy

- All national local government associations can do more to promote international development amongst their members and develop policy where it does not exist. The Local Government Association's International Development Policy (2002) could be reviewed and promoted;
- Supportive legislation, such as the Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993, needs to be made more widely known; and
- Both of these need to be supported with guidance as to how they can be adapted and applied by individual authorities within their own international policy and programmes.

Practice

- Local communities can play a strong role in establishing and supporting overseas partnerships. Local authority and community links should be further encouraged;
- Greater information and advice is required about the funding opportunities available. This should be supported with increased funding; and
- Networks to assist the exchange of good practice should be set up and facilitated.

Information and education

- Information resources need to be improved, especially online information, with case studies, key organisations etc; and

- More authorities need to be encouraged to undertake global development education activities. Development Education Centres should be further promoted.

Required reporting

Some respondents asked for more central government support to undertake international activities. One approach that has been suggested previously would be to include information about European and international activities in Best Value reports and Comprehensive Performance Assessments. As well as information on direct links and partnerships, reported activities could include action within local communities that relate to global issues, such as citizenship education, fair trade promotion etc. This might help to give a greater push to authorities to at least include some global dimension in their work.

Further research

A number of authorities asked for further information about the domestic benefits of getting involved in international development. Partly in response to this, the Alliance has commissioned the University of Birmingham to examine further the challenges and benefits to UK local authorities of getting involved in activities in developing countries. A report of its findings is due in mid-2005.

In addition, conducting this survey has highlighted that it would be valuable to assess where international activities are typically situated in a local authority - or indeed whether there is a 'typical' department where these activities take place

Useful contacts

Alliance members

Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF)
CLGF works to promote and strengthen effective democratic local government throughout the Commonwealth and encourages the exchange of good practice in local government.

Internet <http://www.clgf.org.uk>

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)
COSLA is the representative voice of Scottish local government and also acts as the employers' association on behalf of all Scottish councils.

Internet <http://www.cosla.gov.uk>

Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)
IDeA aims to stimulate and support continual and self-sustaining improvement and development within local government. It focuses on improving the quality of leadership; improving service delivery in the areas of education, children's and adult social care services; and helping councils build sustainable communities.

Internet <http://www.idea.gov.uk>

Local Government International Bureau (LGIB)
LGIB acts as the European and international arm of the LGA and NILGA. LGIB promotes their interests to policy makers in the EU and internationally. It provides services about European and international issues, including publications, seminars, a website, and assists international links and partnerships.

Internet <http://www.lgib.gov.uk>

Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE)
SOLACE is the representative body for senior strategic managers working in the public sector and spans all of the UK. SOLACE Enterprises is a not for profit company which supports the public sector in the UK and internationally. The SOLACE Foundation carries out charitable education and other work relating to SOLACE's own objectives.

Internet <http://www.solace.org.uk>

Associated partner

Department for International Development (DFID)
DFID is the UK government department that manages Britain's aid to poor countries and works to get rid of extreme poverty. It operates a number of different funding schemes to promote sustainable development and eliminate poverty and is currently funding the work of the Alliance.

Internet <http://www.dfid.gov.uk>

Alliance website

To keep up to date on developments in local authority international work, visit the Alliance's website. It contains details of what the Alliance has been doing, as well as the decisions taken at a global level that may impact on development issues.

It also allows visitors to register to receive a bimonthly e-mail update on local government international development work.

Internet
<http://www.lgib.gov.uk/lg-alliance>

If you have any queries about the survey or the Alliance please contact:

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