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Prospects for Cooperation between Polish and African Local Governments

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International activity of local governments may be one of the most important tools for Poland's involvement in Sub-Saharan African countries. By organising business missions and information activities, local government units support local enterprises in African markets. Another area of cities and regions' engagement is development and humanitarian aid in the poorer regions of the continent. Due to the rapid urbanisation in African countries, cooperation with local authorities can also become an important element of the exchange of experience and promotion of Polish cities.

Poland is intensifying political and economic relations in Africa, which is reflected in the restoration of embassies, for example, in Senegal and Tanzania. The number of Polish companies operating on the continent has increased by about 1,000 since 2013. Both the final declaration of the First Africa-Europe Local and Regional Government Forum (2017) and the Polish Multi-annual Development Cooperation Programme for 2016 to 2020 indicate the importance of the local government dimension of activity in Africa. However, due to the distance and lack of traditions of relationships at this level, there are currently only two formal partnerships. In 2000, the Pomeranian Voivodeship concluded an agreement with the East Cape Province in South Africa, but the partners do not carry out joint initiatives. The Wielkopolska Voivodeship signed a letter of intent for cooperation with the Huila province in Angola in March 2018, announcing joint activities in the economic, technical, agricultural, environmental, scientific and socio-scientific fields. Regardless of formal contacts, Polish self-governments are more and more often undertaking ad hoc activities aimed at promoting cities and regions, supporting local entrepreneurs and Polish universities. The involvement of cities is mainly limited to humanitarian aid in cooperation with local entities.

Past Activities. Local authorities mainly support companies from their regions by organising expert seminars for entrepreneurs interested in investing in Africa. In 2018, Łódź Regional Development Agency (LRDA), Pomerania Development Agency and the Marshal's Office of Lower Silesia hosted such events. Regional development agencies, such as LRDA and the Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolska Region, co-organise economic missions.

Some cities launch their own humanitarian initiatives or join those organised by Polish local NGOs, churches and schools. Most often their goal is to dig wells to give local communities access to drinking water. Grodzisk Mazowiecki organised fundraising to build a school in Zambia's Makululu. Opole, which offers humanitarian support to Legmoïn in Burkina Faso, extended its partnerships with Africa at the initiative of its French partner, the city of Grasse.

There are also activities which are not initiated by local governments, but which help to promote them. In 2017, the Academy of Fishery and Marine Sciences was opened in Namibe, Angola. This, the largest

European educational project in Africa, is being implemented by the Sopot-based Navimor company in the framework of an intergovernmental-tied aid credit agreement, in partnership with the Gdynia Maritime University. The Academy's structure was largely copied from Gdynia's. Also, scientists from Pomerania compiled textbooks for the Angolan school. Lecturers will include Angolan graduates of the university in Gdynia, and scientific cooperation and personnel exchanges are on the way. In 2014, long before the Academy was launched and the investment-inspired contacts between the regions began, the first talks were held between officials from Namibe and Pomerania.

Potential Areas of Cooperation. The World Bank predicts urban population of Sub-Saharan Africa, now estimated at 472 million, will double in 25 years. Cities must address the demographic challenges and meet the expectations of the growing middle class. In this respect, smart solutions for city management offer huge potential. African metropolises are open for know-how from other parts of the world in both the holistic, strategic approach and the technicalities of individual solutions. Göteborg, tied to Johannesburg, shares experience in waste disposal, public libraries, sport and tourism. European cities also borrow from African partners. Ghent looked into South African Mangaung's experience in designing its own scheme for local community participation in planning city development strategy. Mutual benefits may come with Polish cities' cooperation with African metropolises preparing for constructions of ecological and intelligent "cities of the future." These include Dakar's Diamniadio, Kigali's Vision City, Johannesburg's Waterfall City and Lagos' Eko Atlantic. Polish experience in the development of low carbon public transport and participatory budget may be shared with African counterparts.

Institutional Support. The local governments' engagement in cooperation in Africa has the institutional support of the EU. This applies to development cooperation and actions for sustainable development, migration and climate. The EU will decide on the next multi-annual Financial Framework in the coming months. Currently, local governments can use the Development Cooperation Instrument, which contains a thematic component specifically dedicated to civil society organisations and local government units. In the next financial cycle, the European Commission proposes to merge the seven existing external instruments into one "Instrument for Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation." Neighbouring countries and Sub-Saharan Africa remain among the priority directions of cooperation. Local authorities are indicated as partner institutions, including for the support of local democracy development and capacity-building for cities in non-EU countries.

International networks provide the forum for discussion on cooperation and contemporary challenges for cities in Africa. The African section of UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments) is very active. The European member of UCLG is CEMR (Council of European Municipalities and Regions), of which the Association of Polish Cities is part.

The first Africa-Europe Local and Regional Government Forum was organised in November 2017, on the occasion of the African Union-EU summit in Abidjan. It was a UCLG initiative attended by 150 representatives of local and regional authorities from both continents. European partners are also taking part in the eighth UCLG Africa Summit in Marrakech (20–24 November), which is focusing on the role of territorial units in the development of sustainable cities and regions. The active participation of cities in such and similar forums allows information exchange, matching offers and the extension of the partner network.

Foreign Trade Offices are becoming more and more accessible as instruments serving information about the specific nature of a given market and supporting entities interested in establishing contacts in a particular country. In Sub-Saharan Africa, these offices are in Kenya, Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Senegal.

Recommendations. The expanding network of embassies and PAIH Foreign Trade Offices may help local governments to establish and maintain contacts with African partners. Combining government and self-government initiatives, a better flow of information and the inclusion of local players in cooperation would also increase the effectiveness of actions taken and strengthen the brand of Poland as a state. Due to urbanisation, city partnerships could be an important cooperation platform. To implement them, it is necessary to ensure that Polish local governments are better prepared in the field of intercultural communication. It would be good for Polish local governments to benefit from the lessons learned by local authorities from countries more experienced in Africa, and from forums such as CEMR.

When organising trade missions, conferences and humanitarian aid, local governments usually use their own resources. They could reach for EU funds more often, although the rules on the participation of local governments in new EU instruments have not yet been specified. In the area of development aid, the admission of local governments to tender processes organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for activities in this region should be considered. This would facilitate the establishment of a broader objective of strengthening local authorities in partner countries included in the Multi-annual Development Cooperation Programme. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' International Humanitarian Trade Fair, due to be held in June 2019, will be an opportunity for discussion on humanitarian aid.