Consultative Group Comments on Draft Final Report

FROM UNEP

Thank you for providing us with an opportunity to comment on the draft final report of the Cities Alliance (CA) Independent Evaluation conducted by Universalia. You had asked for feedback on:
- Factual errors
- Gaps or omissions that may have led the evaluators to misrepresent the CA
- Whether the recommendations are crafted in a way that can help the CA move forward.

I think that the findings are sound and recommendations are drafted in a clear and action-oriented way. However, I do feel that the report has some omissions which I am outlining below:

- Finding 3 - Cities with limited resources do not access CA funding: I agree with this finding and would like to add that project development requirements are very much geared towards field agencies (i.e., World Bank and bilateral agencies) with a huge presence and support network on the ground. CA criteria require members to identify co-sponsors and stakeholders already in the project development stage. This requires a lot of resources in time and money which many cities and members without field presence don't have.

- Finding 4 - Slum Upgrading (SU) and City Development Strategies (CDS) are appropriate and flexible enough to embrace key urban issues: UNEP feels strongly that the cross-cutting issue of sustainable urban development, and specifically the environmental component, has NOT been given the attention it needs in CA projects and processes. Taking the environment seriously does not mean diluting CA efforts (a fear that CG and CA Secretariat are reported to have expressed). On the contrary, there is ample evidence showing that poverty eradication cannot be achieved without sound environmental planning and management. This point was reiterated during interviews with Universalia and is reflected nowhere in the report.

- Finding 18 - Addition of recipient countries to the CG: I agree with the finding that it is important to inject the recipient perspective in the CG as well and also with the recommendation to develop "conflict of interest guidelines". However, this finding does not touch upon the fact that there is no mechanism or formalized process for accepting new members to the CA. The recent addition of Ethiopia has raised questions whether the CG needs to have more control over who joins as a member.

- Finding 29 - Grant approval process: This finding omits the fact that some CA criteria for evaluation of proposals have more weight than others. Especially criteria 9 "Positive Impact on the Environment" has been treated as an "add-on". Neither the Secretariat nor the assessors are experts in environment and very few proposals provide convincing evidence on how they will benefit the environment.

Just a note to add that in my experience delays with grant approval processes are mostly encountered during the revision stage after the Secretariat has submitted comments (its own and those by independent technical assessors).

- Finding 30 - CA proposal review process: UNEP has reviewed a lot of CA proposals and given suggestions on how the environmental component can be improved. The Secretariat has incorporated these in their project reviews. However, in more than one case project proposals have been approved BEFORE suggested changes had been incorporated into the proposal. One of these proposals was so weak that UNEP would NOT have approved the project without the suggested improvements. Therefore, we believe that the habit of approving projects without re-submission of a revised proposal and the clear consent of members has to stop. Our impression...
is (and the approval rate of 90.6% is an indication) that far too many projects are approved to the
detriment of quality.

I hope these points are helpful!
Kind regards
Julia

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FROM GTZ

Thanks you for the draft report of the Independent Evaluation of the Cities Alliance. The report reflects important topics and presents a sound basis to discuss findings and recommendations and to decide on the future strategy of the Cities Alliance during the Consultative Group meeting in November this year.

Specific comments:

P. 48 (Finding 31), 3rd par.: The following sentence "Interviews with representatives indicate that CA is very relevant to donor agencies, particularly those in which the urban agenda seems to be declining and those that have a limited field presence (namely USAID or GTZ)." needs to be changed.

Our proposal is: "Interviews with representatives indicate that CA is very relevant to donor agencies, particularly those in which the urban agenda seems to be declining and those that have a declining budget (namely USAID or Germany)

In volume III a correction is needed. Please delete "Friedegund Mascher“ from the list of interviewed persons. There was no face-to-face interview carried out since I could not participate in Vancouver.

The recommendations are crafted in a way that can help the CA move forward. However, the strategic significance and practicability of recommended actions vary.

Best regards

r. friedegund mascher

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