Lund University Master of Science in

International Development and Management

August 2022

It Takes Two to Tango -

Does 'Municipal Partnership' promote mutuality and equality between Global North and South partners?

Author: Da Sol, Jung

Supervisor: Christopher Mathieu

Abstract

The partnership-based approach in international development cooperation is believed to bring a more balanced relationship between the actors than traditional development approaches. However, previous studies have revealed limitations in achieving a mutual relationship between the partners. This study examines the relationship and the power dynamic between the partners participating in a partnership called 'municipal partnership', operated by the Swedish non-profit organisation ICLD. Applying the partnership approach and participatory development aspects, as conceptual groundings, this study explores whether the partnership between the Swedish and African (Kenya and Zambia) municipalities can be understood as a mutual relationship and if it brings more power balance. The thesis further explores the impact of this partnership on local development.

Eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings show that the municipal partnership promotes mutuality to a great extent as there are no pre-set conditions, and the entire process is formulated based on the agreement between the partners. However, participants from Sweden and Africa showed different opinions regarding the power dynamic. The findings indicate that the municipal partnership brings mutuality and a balanced relationship between the partners in terms of the programme process but still has limitations in achieving power equality due to the structural barriers.

Keywords: municipal partnership, mutuality, relationship, power dynamic, local development, international development cooperation

Word Count: 14,805

Acknowledgements

List of Abbreviations

C2C	City-to-City Cooperation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DC	Decentralised Cooperation
ICLD	Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy
IMC	International Municipal Cooperation
LMICs	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
MP	Municipal Partnership
MPP	Municipal Partnership Programme
MSPs	Multi-stakeholder partnerships
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPPs	Public-Private partnerships
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SALAR	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SSC	South-South Cooperation

Table of Contents

List of Tables

1. Introduction

According to previous research on development cooperation, the partnership-based approach is believed to bring a more balanced relationship between the donor and recipient, increase the recipient's ownership and create practical benefits (Martella and Schunk, 1997; Stibbe, Reid & Gilbert, 2018). Up until today, there have been several types of partnerships in the development sector. The most common partnership was the bilateral or government-to-government approach (Black, 2020). However, recently, various forms of collaboration, such as public-private partnerships (PPPs), multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)[1], and South-South Cooperation (SSC)[2], started to appear (Black, 2020; Stibbe et al., 2018). All these different partnership types have resulted in a shift in the traditional donor-recipient relationships. It is no longer just one-way assistance where developed nations or major donor organisations simply provide support to the developing countries (Horner, 2020).

For several decades, there has been a continuous debate on the effectiveness and impact of development cooperation. Practitioners and researchers in the development sector pinpointed the limitations of traditional development approaches, which failed to fulfil the actual needs of the recipients and achieve substantial results as they were predominantly structured by the donors (Keijzer & Black, 2020; OECD, n.d.). However, growing concerns about the inadequacies of the previous approaches have brought attention to how development projects should be structured, core values that need to be considered and the role of donor and recipient in the cooperation processes (del Biondo, 2020; Hewitt, 2002).

In the 2005 Paris Declaration, increased involvement and ownership of the recipient were adopted as the core principles in improving the impact and sustainability of development cooperation (Brown, 2020; Keijzer & Black, 2020). Furthermore, alignment between the donor's strategies and the local initiatives was also emphasised. The traditional cooperation structure and donor-recipient relationship needed to be transformed to achieve these. Since the Paris Declaration, the partnership began to grow as a new way to work with development cooperation. In 2015, the notion of the partnership was again highlighted with the establishment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs stress the importance of

---

[1] Partnership between a public authority and one or more private stakeholders (Fernández de Losada Passols & Moreno, 2018: 5).
[2] Collaboration between local authorities and their associations from two or more developing countries (Nganje, 2015: 4).

partnership, as it is an essential tool for achieving sustainable social and economic development (Sondermann & Ulbert, 2021). Moreover, SDG 17 demands the international community to 'strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development' (The Global Goals, n.d.).

In this study, a relatively undiscovered format of partnership called 'municipal partnership (MP)' will be analysed. The municipal partnership in the development cooperation is a form of collaboration between the municipalities from two or more countries (Bontenbal, 2013). A partnership is usually formed between one city from a developed and one from a developing country. However, there is only limited research on the MP between Global North-South[3]. With only narrow research being done, this study aims to explore the meaning and contribution of the MP. This study will focus on the municipal partnership programme (MPP) operated by the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD). This programme is a partnership between the Swedish municipalities and partnering countries' municipalities (Table 1), and for this study, the three partnerships established between Swedish and African – Zambia and Kenya – municipalities will be explored. Before presenting the aim and research questions, background information related to this study will be presented.

---

[3] Global South refers broadly to less developed or developing countries and Global North to developed countries. Definition of term Global South and Global North will be presented in detail under section 4.2.

2. Background

2.1. The Criticism towards Donor-driven Cooperation

International development cooperation has existed for many years in various shapes and terminologies. Terms such as foreign aid, emergency relief, humanitarian aid and development assistance are a few other ways to describe development cooperation. However, according to Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pederson (2003), it is not easy to have a clear division between these terms as all these development initiatives are becoming more integrated and overlapped in their activities over the years. In general, the idea of international development emerged to eradicate inequalities between the nations and poverty around the world (Develtere, Huyse & Van Ongevalle, 2021). Therefore, development cooperation has been, for many decades, largely a one-way manner where the developed nations, so-called donors, provide financial resources and technical support to the less developed countries or recipients to promote the development of the economy and welfare of these countries (Horner, 2020).

In most cases, development projects or programmes were designed, implemented, and controlled by developed countries or donor agencies (McEwan, 2019), even though the aim is primarily to improve the situation of developing countries. According to Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen (2003), traditional development cooperation has been criticised since the 1990s. The projects formulated based on the donor's idea were not making sufficient progress in the developing countries. In many cases, the donors outlined the project agendas and conditions based on their interests and political motivation (Horner, 2020; Martella & Schunk, 1997). Donorship-based interventions showed a lack of continuity and sustainability of local development and low effectiveness (Brown, 2020; Nascimbeni, 2008). A lack of understanding of the local situation and setting excessively ambitious goals that did not align with local policies were a few reasons for shortcomings (Wescott & Wessal, 2014). Furthermore, it created adverse effects or hindrance rather than support in some developing countries.

According to Park (2019), some critics argued that traditional aid programmes had disappointing results in poverty reduction and economic development, especially in Africa, as African governance and administrative capacity weakened with donor-led initiatives. These kinds of criticisms have awakened demands for innovative approaches and opened a discussion on the importance of the recipient's involvement. In 1996, the OECD report emphasised

recipient-owned development approaches as a way to overcome these issues (Hasselskog & Schierenbeck, 2017). Since then, the participation of recipient countries has become a fundamental principle for increasing the effectiveness of development cooperation but also reducing the unequal power relationship between the donor-recipient (Stott & Murphy, 2020). Unlike before, developing countries' national strategies and policies began to be a starting point in formulating cooperation projects (Develtere et al., 2021).

Throughout the years, the cooperation landscape has transformed from a one-way to a two-way partnership-based approach (Develtere et al., 2021). The one-way approach where financial or specific sector-oriented supports were given was no longer relevant to addressing the complex societal issues and challenges due to rapid growth in many developing countries (Rahman & Baranyi, 2018; Ramaswamy et al., 2016). As mentioned previously, there has been a number of different partnerships emerging in the development sector over the years to meet the local needs. The following section will present a specific partnership called the municipal partnership programme operated by the ICLD. A detailed description of the development cooperation relationships and partnership concepts will be presented later in section 4.

2.2. Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy

The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is a non-profit organisation funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The ICLD works with democracy and sustainable development by focusing on local self-governance and decentralisation (ICLD, 2020). In addition, the organisation aims to contribute to sustainable democratic development in Sweden and their international partnering countries (ICLD, 2021). The Municipal Partnership Programme (MPP) was initially operated by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), which was modified into its current form and transferred to ICLD in 2009.

The objective of the ICLD is to strengthen the capacity of local and regional political bodies and to support the expansion of the residents' democratic participation in local political processes to ensure equitable and sustainable development (ICLD, 2020; ICLD, 2021). In achieving this, ICLD is operating a programme called the 'municipal partnership programme'. The core of the MPP is a joint learning and knowledge production process between the Swedish and international partners (ICLD, n.d.). These shared experiences and knowledge enable both

partners to address a similar problem in a different context and jointly develop new ways to tackle the identified issues (Sonesson & Nordén, 2020). Through diverse collaborative activities such as two-way field visits and workshops, the programme seeks to improve the institutional capacity in various areas of municipal responsibility, with its focus on enhancing democratic processes (ICLD, 2020).

Table 1. List of Partnering Countries

Regional Cluster	Countries
Eastern Europe	Kosovo, Serbia, Ukraine
Latin America	Colombia, Guatemala
Eastern Africa	Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda
Southern Africa	Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe

The MPP is a core component of ICLD, which emphasise the active collaboration between the Swedish municipalities and local governments in ICLD's partnering countries. Municipalities or local governments in thirteen countries (Table 1) in the four regional clusters are primarily eligible to participate and establish new partnerships (ICLD, 2021). In addition to this, seven countries[4] with previously established connections are also able to participate in the MPP. These partnering countries are selected based on the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list (ICLD, n.d.). Unlike many traditional development relationships, the MPP emphasises the value of joint engagements and active involvement of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) local governments. This concept provides opportunities for partnering countries to plan a project that includes their needs and supports them in building their capacity to deal with local problems. Furthermore, it is expected to create more long-term and sustainable changes suitable for their context.

The structure of the MPP is divided into two phases, the 'inception' and the 'project'. The 'inception phase' is a one-year activity aiming to establish a stable partnership and arrange groundwork for upcoming collaboration. During this phase, the partners are able to discuss ideas on possible cooperating areas. In addition, activities such as defining specific problems, identifying priority development areas, and preparing the project proposal are carried out. The

---

[4] Bosnia and Hercegovina, Georgia, North Makedonia, Moldavia, China, Mozambique, and Namibia. No new collaboration with local governments in these countries are available.

important part is that jointly defined challenges for the project phase should be at the institutional level within both parties' operating spheres (ICLD, 2021). Moreover, the objectives should contribute to establishing efficient and democratic political processes at the local or regional level.

The 'project phase' can take up to three years and consists of two groups: the steering group and the project team. The steering group is an essential part of the MPP that requires both partners to set up a group composed of elected political representatives of the current majority, opposition, and leading public officials from the regional/local government of both countries (ICLD, n.d.; ICLD, 2021). The steering group members must be separated from the project members, and their main task is to act as a guarantor for the partnership and to ensure the designed project can be sustainable (ICLD, 2021). The project needs to be based on a problem that both partners can work on at the institutional level and has ICLD's thematic priorities: conflict, gender equality, and the environmental and climate perspectives (ICLD, 2020:11). For this partnership, both municipalities must specify the effects, and changes of this partnership and also state the potential beneficiaries of the projects. MPP aims to share experience on how similar problems could be addressed differently based on context and jointly create new knowledge or methods that can support increased citizen involvement at the local level. Therefore, activities such as regular meetings and producing information materials can be carried out. Furthermore, a dissemination conference can be arranged by the completion of the project to spread the knowledge and experiences acquired from the partnership to other municipalities, regions, and county councils to have a broader impact at the local level (ICLD, 2021).

3. Aim and Research Questions

As partnerships are considered essential and innovative for achieving sustainable development in recent years, this brings questions such as how the partnership works in the practical world and what partnership contributes to the local level. Based on these starting points, this study aims to observe the impact of a specific partnership. As mentioned, the municipal partnership between the developed and developing countries has relatively limited studies compared to other development cooperation partnerships such as private-public or South-South partnerships. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of municipal partnership on the relationship between the Swedish and African partners and its impact on the local development progress by looking at the case of the ICLD's MPP. Furthermore, the study will explore if municipal partnership practices are done in a participatory and mutual manner for both partners. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do partners from both African and Swedish municipalities perceive Municipal Partnership Programme in terms of mutuality?

2. How can the relationship and power dynamic between Swedish and African municipalities[5] be understood?

3. Does the Municipal Partnership Programme contribute to the sustainable development of African municipalities? And if so, how?

---

[5] The 'African municipalities' or 'African partners' in the research question refer to Kenyan and Zambian municipalities that participated in this study. This term will be used throughout this thesis instead of mentioning Kenyan and Zambian municipalities.

4. Literature Review

This section will present some of the major themes related to this research. Firstly, the role of local government as a major player in the development cooperation will be discussed by looking at the decentralised cooperation. Following that, the relationship between the developed and developing countries and how it has evolved will be described. Additionally, the emergence of the partnership in the development cooperation context and a few previous research on the main topic, 'municipal partnership', will be presented. Lastly, the research rationale will be briefly mentioned.

4.1. Decentralised Cooperation

The concept of decentralised cooperation (DC) emerged in the 1980s, with the growing debate on improving the effectiveness of development cooperation. DC is broadly defined as cooperation between the municipalities of developed and developing countries, and terms such as city-to-city cooperation (C2C) and international municipality cooperation (IMC) can be interchangeable with DC (Hafteck, 2003; OECD, 2019). However, there has been some misinterpretation of the term DC in the development sector. For example, Hafteck (2003) states that some have understood DC as donors or developed countries helping the decentralisation of developing countries or collaboration between municipalities from one country.

According to Hafteck (2003), DC is a combination of two fields: development cooperation and international relations of local governments. Hafteck identifies core elements of this cooperation based on various entities' definitions. Commonly, the definition involves three points: 1) the lead actors, 2) an overarching objective and 3) the nature of activities carried out (Hafteck, 2003:333). The critical point is that the lead actors of DC are local or regional governments, and the purpose should be focused on sustainable development at the local level. Unlike other previous twinning programmes where cultural exchange was the main activity, this cooperation is about sharing or exchanging knowledge, experiences, and practical skills among the local governments, usually between developed and developing countries (ibid.).

Other researchers have identified some of the impacts and factors contributing to successful decentralised cooperation, especially at the municipality level. Bontenbal and van Lindert (2006) state this cooperation as a peer-to-peer approach where experts from municipalities of the Global North-South formulate partnerships and exchange their professional knowledge.

Such exchanges allow subnational authorities to learn and gain expertise, technical information, and best practices, which can be beneficial in planning local development activities (ibid.). It is also mentioned that the knowledge and experiences gained through the DC are not limited to being applied in one specific project. Instead, it contributes to strengthening the capacity of local officers and can be used multiple times, which results in a long-term impact on the local situation. They also point out that things such as clearly defined objectives and mutual expectations or building trust should be considered for successful cooperation. Apart from that, local civil society or community-wide participation is also mentioned as a crucial factor (ibid.).

4.2. Relationship between the Developed and Developing Countries

Traditional development relationships often involve a 'Global North-South' binary, which has been the dominant viewpoint in the development sector for quite some time. Brandt (1980) defines the North-South by classifying the "North" as wealthy and developed countries and the "South" as less industrial or developing nations. With this distinction, the relationships in development cooperation usually created a unidirectional flow of resources, capacity, and technical support from the North to the South (Bontenbal, 2013). From the early days of development cooperation, the North-South relationships have been based on extreme hierarchical order with a clear division between providers and beneficiaries (Fejerskov, Lundsgaarde & Cold-Ravnkilde, 2016). Developing countries, which received development assistance, were often understood as 'weak actors' that lacked the ability to overcome their shortcomings or solve their problems (Develtere et al., 2021). Often, the experiences and knowledge of the North were regarded better than that of the South, which gave the developed countries more power (Hately & Malhotra, 1997).

The imbalance of power has always been an issue in development cooperation. Hately and Malhotra (1997) stated that regardless of the original intention, traditional development approaches had created inequalities between the players, where the South remained powerless. These kinds of unevenly distributed power between the developed and developing countries have been mentioned by several researchers. It is argued that the imbalanced power was a hindrance for developing countries in attaining and exercising ownership (Keijzer & Black, 2020), and in the case of many in Africa, this has caused a lack of administrative capacity (Park, 2019). Furthermore, this has resulted in the Global South simply accepting what is given by the donors or the Global North without being able to request or negotiate their needs (Develtere

et al., 2021; Grace, 2015). As the development initiative based on the traditional development relationships started to bring more challenges than positive effects on development, demands for a new cooperation approach increased.

The necessity of developing countries expressing their needs actively to the donors or participating in development processes has been discussed for quite some time. Michanek (1971) pointed out that developing countries are the ones that need to draw up their own development plans and implementation. In addition, Martella and Schunk (1997) also emphasised the importance of having a continuous dialogue between the donors and recipient's local governments or citizens to sustain the development project outcomes even after their completion. As a result, the so-called 'donor-recipient relationship' structure has been slightly transformed from a vertical into a horizontal one. Instead of donors imposing their concept and the idea of development, they are trying to include recipients as partners in planning and implementation (Abrahamsen, 2004). The clear division between the 'developed' and 'developing' countries is becoming blurry (Horner, 2020), and the term 'partnership' is now replacing the traditional donor-recipient relationships (Blagescu & Young, 2005).

4.3. Partnership as Development Cooperation

The partnership implies an equitable relationship between the actors working on a common agenda (Blagescu & Young, 2005). In development cooperation, the partnership concept was introduced in the 1960s, and since then, it has been recognised as a critical factor for sustainable and effective development (del Biondo, 2020; OECD, 2015). In 1996, the OECD DAC development strategy described the partnership as shared responsibilities between developing countries and their external partners (Maxwell & Conway, 2000). Following this, quite many dialogues around 'what partnership is' and 'how it should be formulated' has been made by various agencies (Eyben et al., 2007; Stott & Murphy, 2020). The most recent emphasis on partnership is the SDGs, which stresses the importance of the partnership that emphasises the mutuality, co-learning, and strengthening systems of LMICs for long-term development (Jones, 2016).

The partnership can be diverse in the development sector based on the involved actors. According to Brinkerhoff (2002a), potential partners in international development can be national and local governments, international donor agencies, civil societies, community-based

organisations and even the private sector. However, recent studies on development cooperation started to have focused on the partnership between the public-private sector or South-South cooperation (SSC) (Eyben, 2013). Even though the cooperation between the developing and developed countries produces numerous benefits, the recent focus has moved to peer-to-peer cooperation among the South-South rather than looking at North-South cooperation. Studies show that a reason behind the increased interest in SSC is that it produces more suitable and relevant solutions to the problems that developing countries are currently facing (Nganje, 2015). Furthermore, it is believed that the SSC brings less power inequality between the actors compared to the traditional development approach or partnership between the North-South (Fejerskov, Lundsgaarde & Cold-Ravnkilde, 2016).

The previous studies on South-North cooperation have observed the core aspects necessary for genuine partnership. Few researchers noted the importance of open dialogue between the partners from the early stage of partnership formulation, as partners often have enormous gaps in cultures, contexts, organisational structures, and experiences (Blagescu & Young, 2005). Without truthful discussion, there is a huge risk that actors will end up having different interests or expectations (Glasbergen, Biermann & Mol, 2007). Researchers claimed that shared dialogue is a compulsory step in the partnership, as it leads to mutual understanding, builds trust, and encourages partners to draw overlapping agendas (Brinkerhoff, 2002b).

Another core notion of partnership mentioned by researchers is capacity building. Capacity building is viewed as an immediate effect of partnership, which is fundamental for achieving objectives and bringing a wider impact to the organisation (Brinkerhoff, 2002b). According to Bontenbal (2009), capacity building can aim at individual development, organisational improvement, or institutional reform. Especially in the case of a partnership between the cities, the capacity building aims to support organisational improvement by fostering local government officials or technicians (ibid.). It is also pinpointed that successful capacity building can occur when aligned with existing knowledge, practices, and internal initiatives. However, Aagaard and Eberhard Trykker (2020) stress that capacity building merely happens to the developing countries in the partnership between the developing and developed countries, rather than resulting in a mutual improvement. Furthermore, Angeles and Gurstein (2000) also argue that more attention needs to be made to how enhanced capacity during a specific project can bring a long-term impact and contribute to local development.

One other important aspect often discussed in partnership studies is the power dynamic. Even though the partnership is expected to bring balanced power, there is still debate on power inequality between the partners. Angeles and Gurstein (2000) bring up the issue of autonomy, that just implying the term partnership would not necessarily make the partners with less power be able to make decisions. Previous studies have stressed that there will always be a certain power imbalance between the partners as the Northern partners or donor entities generally have control over the resources (Blagescu & Young, 2005; Hatton & Schroeder, 2007). The financial resources make it difficult for the developing countries or recipients to engage equally in all types of development cooperation (del Biondo, 2020). Apart from that, the knowledge gaps and structural inequalities between the actors are also regarded as factors that cause power issues (Johnson & Wilson, 2009).

4.4. Previous Studies on Municipal Cooperation

In this section, a few previous studies on the cooperation between the subnational authorities among the developed and developing countries will be presented. As mentioned, international municipal cooperation (IMC) is one way to describe decentralised cooperation. The only point that might differ between the IMC and the DC is that the actors in the IMC are strictly limited to the municipalities. van Ewijk (2008) defines IMC as a development cooperation approach between municipalities in the global North and South that utilises the local-to-local transnational relations at the core of the cooperation activities. In general, the partnership between municipalities aims to provide development support to the South, but it is being said that the North also benefits from it (Bontenbal, 2013). Many researchers argue that the IMC has greater advantages in promoting development over a longer period and that it provides possibilities for sustainable capacity building of local officers (van Ewijk et al., 2015). Moreover, these advantages have probabilities for organisational learning or multiplier effects on other local governments (Jones & Blunt, 1999; van Lindert, 2009; van Ewijk et al., 2015).

Previous studies on the municipal partnership between the North-South have mainly focused on learning processes, outcomes, and challenges. The learning outcomes and effects of knowledge exchange between the North-South partnerships can be found in Bontenbal's (2013) article. By studying six different municipal partnerships between the Netherlands and its partnering cities in the Global South, she examined the learning benefits and values created from the partnership. The result showed that the professional learning outcomes differed

greatly between the North and South. While the South gained professional knowledge and technical skills from the partnership, the North had more soft benefits, such as increased awareness of the developing countries or global issues (Bontenbal, 2013).

Similar findings can also be found in Wilson and Johnson's article, where the municipal partnership between the UK and Uganda was observed. Wilson and Johnson (2007) discovered that the officers in the UK did not gain any specific professional knowledge or skills but rather had opportunities to reflect on their work and improve their understanding of the other part of the world. This study also showed that the officers from developed and developing countries contributed to the learning process differently. Even though the municipal partnership promotes shared learning in an equal manner, officers from the North ended up having a role as a consultant or teachers. Even though the partnership should be a two-way learning process, with the dissimilarities in context, techniques and systems, knowledge-sharing between the partners was asymmetric, which was highly one partner transferring specific knowledge (ibid.). It is also claimed by Jones and Blunt (1999) that the partners involved in development cooperation are not and cannot be fully equal, including the IMC. But as Devers-Kanoglu (2009) points out, the interesting and important aspect of the municipal partnership is that it strives to put partners from developed and developing countries in an equal position and tries to bring mutual benefits.

In some research, the limitations of municipal partnerships have been identified. Based on the municipal partnerships in South Africa, de Villiers (2009) argues that a clear guideline and management framework are necessary to ensure the delivery of purposes and expectations of each partner but also to have meaningful contribution over an extended period. It is also claimed that many IMC projects fail or do not have a continuous relationship as municipalities and officers participating in these activities have limited experience in international development cooperation. Wilson and Johnson (2007) also mention how the municipal partnership lacks mechanisms that can elevate individual learning to organisational learning, even though it provides a ground for the shared learning process. Often the learning benefits occur at the personal level in terms of developing insights or strengthening one's practical skills but create only limited structural or operational improvement at the institutional level (de Villiers, 2009; Johnson & Wilson, 2009; van Ewijk, 2012; van Lindert, 2009).

Regarding the ICLD's municipal partnership, there has been one journal article that studied the partnership between Namibia and Sweden. Like many other studies presented above, they have examined the learning outcomes and challenges of municipal partnership. Apart from what is previously mentioned, Sonesson and Nordén (2020) identify the importance of having higher-level officials or politicians in the implementation process. The fundamental aim of the municipal partnership is to improve public service delivery and quality of services by improving the competence of local government (van Ewijk et al., 2015), which might require structural reform. These kinds of improvements are unable unless there is understanding and constant support from the decision-makers. Van Lindert (2009) also states that it is important for politicians to partake in knowledge exchanges and support the essentials of effective implementation and sustainable development.

4.5. Research Rationale

As previous research shows, many discussions on the relationship between the developing and developed countries have been made based on the traditional development model and the shortcomings of such model in achieving effective development. With increasing interest in new ways to tackle the growing problems, partnership-based collaboration or inclusion of new actors such as local government became crucial in achieving the SDGs and sustainable development in general. Even though the municipal partnership is initially about a collaboration between the North-South, with the South-South cooperation having a more horizontal structure, the recent research has been mostly focused on the SSC (Fernández de Losada Passols & Moreno, 2018). Furthermore, numerous previous studies in the South-North municipal partnerships focused on the learning processes and challenges of municipal partnerships but rarely investigated the power dynamics or relationship between the partners. Therefore, this study will expand the scope to examine the relationship between the partners and whether this municipal partnership between the developed and developing countries contributes to local development more sustainably.

5. Conceptual Grounding

In this section, two main conceptual groundings: the participatory development and partnership approach, will be presented. These groundings will be applied later in the discussion to understand the characteristics of the municipal partnership and also to examine the relationship between the Swedish and African municipalities. First, a participatory development concept will be presented to emphasise the importance of local involvement in development cooperation. Following that, the partnership formats and the degree of participation will be presented under the partnership approach. Finally, the operationalisation of these conceptual groundings will be briefly explained.

5.1. Participatory Development

With the failure of traditional top-down approaches within the development context, where donors have control over almost all processes, the meaning of participatory development started to grow (Mubita, Libati & Mulonda, 2017). The mismatch between the donor's interventions and the recipient's needs resulted in significant issues of low efficacy and sustainability in development due to cultural or contextual differences (Minasyan, 2016; Mubita et al., 2017). Therefore, it was critical to discuss and find new ways to understand the actual needs of the locals and design development projects that can be adapted to local conditions. Interaction with the locals became essential for development activities as it contributes to increased knowledge and understanding of the society's political and cultural differences as well as the societal structure (Mubita et al., 2017; Nawaz, 2013).

The first appearance of the participatory approach in the development sector was 'popular participation' in rural development projects in the 1970s (Cornwall, 2002; Schwittay & Braund, 2019). The idea behind popular participation was to give opportunities to the poor population to influence the decisions that affect their lives (Cornwall, 2002). In his article, Chambers presents a participatory approach called Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), which emphasises the importance of 'learning about the rural life and conditions from, with and by rural people' (1994: 953). This approach was developed as the local knowledge and competencies were underestimated in many development projects (Bliss & Neumann, 2008). The essential point of PRA is to include local people, their knowledge and experiences in the planning and implementation of the development projects to ensure relevancy and sustainable development (Chamber, 1994).

In a broader development context, White (1996) has developed participation typology based on the different interests of the provider and receiver. White states that involving local people only in the implementation phase is insufficient to achieve participatory development fully. To create proper participation, she argues that locals must partake in the entire process from the planning and management but also be able to make decisions (ibid.). According to White (1996:114), participation can be divided into four types: nominal, instrumental, representative, and transformative. The nominal and instrumental can be understood as passive participation, whilst representative and transformative have active involvement from the locals. The 'nominal' can be understood as passive participation with low local engagement. In the 'instrumental', participation is considered a tool to engage people rather than focusing on the value of local involvement. The 'representative' provides an opportunity for the local people to express their own interests and needs. Especially, transformative participation provides an opportunity for the locals to make decisions regarding their local development, thus reshaping the traditional power relationship between the actors in a more balanced way (White, 1996).

The core of the participatory approach is that people living in the realities and certain contexts should be able to identify their own needs (Kelly & Westoby, 2018). Additionally, both the right and the responsibility for the decision-making and actions to create transformation lay on the local people, community, and organisations (Angeles & Gurstein, 2000; ibid.). The benefits of having the participatory approach are that the development projects are better aligned with the actual needs, and it also ensures sustainability by empowering the involved actors (Kelly & Westoby, 2018; Mansuri & Rao, 2013). Even though the definition and rationales have shifted over the years, participatory development is about engaging people from the local area and having their input in development programmes to ensure that the actual needs are included (Mubita et al., 2017; Nawaz, 2013; Parfitt, 2004). Up until today, most of the previous application of participatory development has focused on the local citizens or the community. However, Eyben, León and Hossain (2007) have applied this concept to examine the relationship and outcome of the partnership between developed and developing countries, which shows that the application can be made on other levels as well.

5.2. Partnership Approach

The concept of partnership, in general, implies having a shared idea, interest, and responsibility between two or more actors (Hately & Malhotra, 1997; Impey & Overton, 2014) and cooperation between these actors for mutual benefit (McQuaid, 2007). A partnership is also identified as a relationship that improves outcomes and produces synergic effects on complex problems which cannot be solved solely by one actor (Brinkerhoff, 2002b). The purpose of operating the partnership is to bring various sectors together, mobilise diverse resources and find more efficient ways to deal with interconnected issues in society (McQuaid, 2007; Stott & Murphy, 2020). The partnership can be developed and involve diverse actors from government, non-profit organisations, civil society, and private organisations.

In international development discourse, the partnership is understood as an empowering approach whereby actors involved in the development cooperation collaborate as equal actors in identifying and solving development-related challenges (Hewitt, 2002). Hately and Malhotra (1997) state that a true partnership should be a two-way relationship where each partner brings different skills, knowledge, and experiences to achieve a mutually defined objective. According to them, the partnership can be categorised in two ways: conventional and reciprocal (Table 2). In a conventional partnership, the relationship between the actors is based on the transfer of skill, knowledge, or resources from one side to the other. This type of partnership has the same characteristics as traditional development cooperation, where support is provided from the Global North to the South. In contrast, the reciprocal partnership is described as an exchange where the project design is based on the interests of both partners and their agreement (ibid.). A true two-way relationship can be accomplished when the relationship between the partners includes all the components that are stated on the right side of Table 2.

Table 2. Partnership Formats

	Based on a one-way relationship (Conventional Partnership)	**Based on a two-way relationship (Reciprocal Partnership)**
Characteristics	Unequal	More Equal
Intervention	Top-down; transfer of knowledge or resource	Mutuality; Build common agenda
Management Orientation	Short-term, Southern projects	Long-term global development programming
Decision-making	Vertical	Horizontal
Leading Actor	Developed nations and donor agencies	All stakeholders related to the issue (including local people or groups)
The extent of local involvement	Implementation phase	Problem identification, project design, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up

(Source: Modified by the author based on Hately and Malhotra, 1997:14)

The ideal relationship for the partnership needs to have more than just common objectives or a shared role in the decision-making process. According to a few researchers, dimensions, or principles such as mutuality, equality, and trust should be at the core of building a true partnership (Brinkerhoff, 2002b; Hately & Malhotra, 1997; Schech et al., 2015). All of these are essential for ensuring an equal power balance between the partners but also to ensure sustainability and continuity by enhancing the ownership of the developing countries (Aagaard & Eberhard Trykker, 2020; McQuaid, 2007). Furthermore, in formulating a meaningful and effective partnership, the participation aspect is critical. According to Brinkerhoff (2002b:89), 'the quality of participation determines how each actor understands the importance of their contribution' to the entire undertaking. Moreover, having a great degree of participation also means the power between the partners is more equally distributed throughout the development practice.

Table 3. Level of Participation and Representation

	Low Participation/ Narrow Representation	High Participation/ Broad Representation
Power	Imbalanced	Balanced
Adaptation	Reluctance to adapt	Willingness to adapt
Trust level	Low trust (Internally and with partners)	High trust (Internally and with partners)
Representatives	Only chief executives or senior officers	All individuals involved

(Source: Modified by the author based on Brinkerhoff, 2002b:90)

As listed in Table 3, increased participation allows all the partners involved in the process to bring their voices to the table in an equal manner and have shared power between the actors. Impey and Overton (2014) also state that a higher level of involvement can result in solid ownership and empowerment of the less-powered actor. Even though the partnership concept is still regarded as ambiguous, many researchers believe that it can advantage recipients to hold ownership in the development sector as it allows them to represent their own needs and create a balanced power between the developed and developing countries (Black, 2020; Hately & Malhotra, 1997; Pearson, 1969).

5.3. Operationalisation

This study aims to examine whether a specific development cooperation partnership – a municipal partnership (MP) – can bring a balanced and mutual relationship between developed and developing countries. By applying the core principles of the partnership approach presented in Table 2, this study will examine if the ICLD's municipal partnership programme actually produces a more equalised relationship and if both partners perceive this partnership as a reciprocal partnership (RQ 1). In addition, Table 3 will be applied to understand if the municipal partnership can be seen as an actual participatory process based on trust and balanced power between the partners (RQ 2). Lastly, the participatory approach will be applied to understand how the MPP impacts the local development of African municipalities. This approach will allow to analyse if the involvement of local municipality promotes sustainable and long-term effects in terms of local development (RQ 3).

6. Methodology

This section will present the research design, data collection and sampling strategies, and data analysis applied in this study. After that, this study's ethical considerations and limitations will also be presented.

6.1. Research Design

A qualitative research design has been used to answer the research questions in this study. The qualitative research design allows researchers to understand the context or setting of issues based on the participants' perspectives and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using a qualitative research approach will enable me to seek relevant stakeholders' insights on the municipal partnership programme. The collected empirical data will be suitable for understanding the relationship between the participants from Sweden and their partnering countries and the meaning of this particular partnership in the development cooperation context. Furthermore, it also helps to interpret undefined challenges and factors within the municipal partnership that might impact sustainable development in their local setting. This study also applies social constructivism as this emphasises the participant's views of the situation and helps to get a deeper understanding of the situation, which allows the researcher to address the 'process of interaction among individuals' by using open-ended interview questions (ibid.: 67).

6.2. Sampling Strategies

One of the most common methods in qualitative research is purposive sampling, as it allows a researcher to select people related to a research question (Bryman, 2012). The participants in this study were initially chosen through purposive sampling by considering the following criteria. Firstly, among the ICLD's MPP, partnerships that started before the COVID-19 were selected. The reason behind this was to ensure that both municipalities had an opportunity to participate and implement all aspects of the partnership but also had sufficient practices to witness any changes made by this partnership. Initially, four partnership projects were contacted, but one declined due to an internal issue. Therefore, three partnership projects were selected: one partnership with Kenya and two with Zambia.

Table 4. List of Selected Partnerships

Partnership	Project Topic	Duration
Sweden -Kenya	Gender Equality	2018 – 2021
Sweden – Zambia	Sustainable Waste Management	2018 – current
Sweden – Zambia	Youth Participation in Environmental Issues	2018 – 2022

As each municipal partnership project has a limited number of actors working in the project team, only one or two team members from each municipality were selected for the interview. During the project years, all three partnerships have experienced members being replaced due to a rotation system or other issues. Therefore, in this study, people who have worked for at least one year have been chosen to ensure that relevant information would be gathered. In total, thirteen individual interviews were conducted, including two pilot studies.

6.3. Data Collection

As the purpose of the study is to understand and get practical knowledge of the 'municipal partnership', semi-structured interviews were employed to gather data. Unlike structured or unstructured interview methods, semi-structured enable interviewees to stay around the central topic but still have the possibility of developing a conversation based on the interviewee's answer (Hammett, Twyman & Graham, 2015). In addition, this approach provides flexibility for a researcher to allow the respondents to express more detailed information or diverse ideas related to the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Turner, 2010).

In this study, online semi-structured interviews were conducted through Zoom and Microsoft Teams with participants in Swedish and their partner municipalities. The interviews were carried out between 23rd February to 18th March 2022. Before the first interview, two interviews were carried out as pilot studies to ensure that the interview questions were clear and well-formulated to minimise confusions which could influence the research results. The interview guide was edited after the two pilot studies and finalised after the first interview was finished. In this study, all thirteen interviews, which included two pilots, were used as primary data.

Table 5. List of Interviewees

Interviewee Number	Role of Interviewee (Title & Role in the municipal partnership)	Country	Date and Interview Duration
Interviewee 1	Public Health Officer & Project Coordinator	Zambia	28. Feb. 2022 (01:16:30)
Interviewee 2	Development Leader & Project Leader	Sweden	02. Mar. 2022 (55:46)
Interviewee 3	Assistant Director of Public Health Dept. & Project Manager	Zambia	03. Mar. 2022 (56:01)
Interviewee 4	International Partnership Expert & Project Coordinator	Sweden	04. Mar. 2022 (01:04:27)
Interviewee 5	Municipal Director & Project Leader	Sweden	04. Mar. 2022 (01:00:11)
Interviewee 6	Director of Social Welfare Dept. & Project Coordinator	Kenya	05. Mar. 2022 (01:02:36)
Interviewee 7	Director of Education Dept. & Project Member	Kenya	07. Mar. 2022 (01:01:21)
Interviewee 8	Product Manager at Environment Dept. & Project Coordinator	Sweden	15. Mar. 2022 (01:00:48)
Interviewee 9	Health Inspector at Public Health Dept. & Project Coordinator	Zambia	16. Mar. 2022 (59:43)
Interviewee 10	Technical Officer at Environment Dept. & Project Member	Sweden	17. Mar. 2022 (01:11:49)
Interviewee 11	Project Manager at Environment Dept. & Project Manager	Sweden	18. Mar. 2022 (01:09:48)

Each interview was recorded with consent from the respondents. The informed consent was obtained, as described in section 6.5. Recorded interviews were primarily transcribed using the online application called 'otter.ai'. However, I have relistened and reviewed each interview transcript to familiarise myself with the data (Yin, 2016) and to ensure there were no missing or incorrectly written sentences. The files uploaded on the transcribing application were deleted once the transcription documents were completed.

6.4. Analysis method

To analyse the collected data, the thematic analysis approach was applied. The thematic analysis is a research tool useful for 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79) and finding repeated patterns or meanings. I have employed Braun and Clarke's six steps: familiarising yourself with your data, generating initial

codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (ibid.:86). Using these steps, I have first re-read the transcripts several times and noted down a few initial ideas. Then, after reviewing multiple times, the interesting meanings from the data were coded based on a few core themes from the conceptual groundings. Once the initial coding was identified, codes were sorted into several primary themes, and then later, these sub-themes were categorised into final themes based on their relevance to this study.

6.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations have been considered following the Ethical Guidelines for Fieldwork of the LUMID programme. After having a brief oral introduction about this study, an information sheet (Appendix 1) was sent to all participants via email. The information sheet contains a summary of the study purpose, data storage and handling, and the participant's rights to refuse and withdraw from participation or not to answer a specific question during the interview. During this phase, participants could reach out for clarification or further information regarding the thesis.

Once interviewees have understood the process and purpose of the thesis, a consent form (Appendix 2) was sent before the actual interview. The consent form included information such as the interview being voluntary, confidentiality, anonymity, and duration of interview storage. All participants agreed to be recorded during the interview and gave consent to being quoted in the thesis. In addition, all participants were fine with their personal information, such as organisation, position, and role, being exposed in the thesis without anonymity. After each interview, the recordings were transferred to a personal laptop, and the original record file was deleted from the recorder. All the transcribed data was password-locked and stored only on a personal laptop.

During the interview, a few respondents requested not to use specific information related to their previous projects with other development agencies or certain events of this municipal partnership programme. In such cases, the recording was partly stopped, and only the notetaking was carried out. At the end of each interview, participants were again informed about their rights to withdraw from the study or delete the recordings and data at any time. However, participants were also informed that withdrawal would not be possible after submitting the thesis.

One other consideration that needed to be made was positionality. Hammett et al. (2015) emphasise the importance of taking positionality seriously by reflecting on their personal, social, and cultural positions that might influence the gathered data or the entire research process (p.51). As being an intern at the ICLD, reaching out to the respondents using the work email address from the ICLD might have affected the answers or hesitant to bring up certain aspects of the programmes. However, to minimise these potential problems, it was clearly stated and explained that this study does not serve as a report to ICLD. Furthermore, before and during the interview, it was informed again that participants could ask to delete or not to be quoted certain meanings if they wished to be anonymous.

6.6. Limitations

There has been some limitations to this study due to interviews being conducted online. In some of the interviews, there have been issues with the internet connection. Based on the interviewee's current residing area, the internet connection was not stable and sometimes resulted in a need to reschedule the interview. This could have brought adverse effects to this study as the flow of the conversation was affected since the interview had to pause for a few times. Having a poor internet connection also has caused issues with the poor audio quality. The breaks and the poor audio quality have highly affected the limited chances for some interview responses to be developed further or more in-depth.

The video access was limited in a few interviews due to the internet connection or the interviewee's situation. In conducting the interview, building a good rapport or dynamic between the interviewer and interviewee is important (Hammett et al., 2015). Even though I had been communicating with the respondents for quite some time before the interview, not being able to see them during the interview made it hard to create an equally comfortable conversation environment as a conventional, offline interview. Moreover, this was also challenging as it was difficult to read the participant's non-verbal signs or capture the nuances that non-verbal gestures can give over Zoom and Teams.

Lastly, carrying out the interviews in English did also, to some extent, affect the quality of this study. Even though all the interviews were conducted in English, some respondents were not entirely comfortable expressing or explaining their experiences and opinions of the municipal

partnership in English. According to Hammett et al. (2015), conducting interviews in English or in a language that is not a first language for the interviewees can limit nuance and expressive details. In some cases, respondents searched the term in English or tried to describe it in detail, but it might not be sufficient to grasp precisely what they intended to say. Furthermore, some expressions were based on their culture or their geographic areas, which needed some further explanations for general understanding.

7. Findings

In this part, the findings from the interviews will be presented in subsections based on the themes that have been identified. First, the characteristics of ICLD's Municipal Partnership Programme (MPP) will be presented to see how participants perceive this particular partnership. Following that, the findings related to the relationship between the partners and the impact of the MPP on the local level will be presented. Lastly, some other findings outside the scope of the conceptual components will also be presented. Discussion on the findings presented in this section will be provided in section 8.

7.1. View on Municipal Partnership Programme
7.1.1. Overall Characteristics

In general, both Swedish and African municipalities in this study have perceived municipal partnership as a true collaboration where both can be actively involved as equal players. Being an equal player was possible as the programme dealt with a challenge that was important for both municipalities. Several interviewees mentioned that the word 'together' is important in this partnership as it is not about waiting for someone to bring an answer but finding the answer by thinking and doing collectively.

Respondents have emphasised that being involved evenly was essential, as the MPP has a bit unique formulation compared to other types of development cooperation. A few African interviewees expressed that the unique part of MPP was not having any pre-set conditions, which determined activities and interventions they needed to follow in advance. This was seen as a great opportunity for them to be active players, as they could develop interventions that align with their local agenda or meet their local needs. Furthermore, as the project objectives were not decided based on the needs of one partner, both partners showed appreciation for being able to get benefits.

> *"This project is a participatory one because it is not like any other partnership where you responded to pre-decided terms and proposals…. This is something that is new, and it is not driven by the pre-set conditions."* (Pilot 2)

"This is about… one part and the other develop together in a common ground or around a common topic. It's not one part, having pity on the other or helping the other…" (Interviewee 5 Sweden)

Both partners have stated that this partnership allows actors to outline a challenge via constant dialogue rather than one party deciding everything solely. It was clearly indicated during the interviews that defining the common challenge was just the starting of a long collaborative journey. Even though the partners were not developing the exact same solutions, the planning and implementation were based on a constant exchange of ideas and feedback. All interviewees have described this programme as a co-working or co-learning process where all participants could freely express their opinions, contribute to project planning, and improve each other's solutions. As stated above, the municipal partnership was not about one partner helping or pursuing the other to take their footsteps. Rather, this was seen more as a mutual development action on a similar problem that both municipalities are facing.

"...the goodness of the partnership is that it's not something that you have to copy what the others are doing. So, the partnership is flexible. It allows you to get an idea from your partner and see how you can implement it in your situation." (Interviewee 9 Zambia)

"There is no copy and paste in terms of doing things. You have to go on the ground and find what works for you with the support from the partnership." (Interviewee 1 Zambia)

"We had to learn about the situation in Kenya. And also learn about the structure in Sweden. […] and when we develop a plan for both partners with understanding what changes are needed and why." (Interviewee 4 Sweden)

Overall, the entire process has been seen as reciprocal, where various stakeholders from both municipalities participated and contributed evenly to each other's development. One Swedish interviewee has stated that this partnership is like working together with a co-worker who is just in another part of the world. Few others also expressed that the municipal partnership is similar to creating a separate working group or task force team rather than two separate groups operating the project together as partners. This clearly shows that the partnership in MPP is

highly mutual and creates a space where all participants have equal inputs and responsibilities regardless of one's country or position.

7.1.2. Operating Format

As briefly mentioned previously, both counterparts had an active role throughout the entire project process. Both African and Swedish interviewees stated that the role and responsibilities were evenly distributed between the partners. Especially one interviewee from the African municipality pointed out that the MPP gave them a chance to actually be involved in intervention planning that was beneficial for their local context. As interviewees stated, the core of this partnership was to create a platform where both counterparts can jointly contribute to each other's development and progress, not trying to make one particular partner gain more involvement than the other. It was revealed that in MPP, both partners share the role of coordinators, consultants, and field officers rather than one end taking the leading position on behalf of both sides.

"All of us were involved in the process. We did the same kind of preparation for a proposal, presentations, and activities. [...] we sit down and talk about processes to ensure that all of us (both municipalities) are involved and agreed on." (Interviewee 6 Kenya)

"We write this mutual program and project... together. Each municipality has responsibility for their parts and tasks but constantly checks each other's progress. It is funding that comes from Sweden, but we are both equally in balance." (Interviewee 5 Sweden)

Amongst all, the exchange of ideas and gaining new perspectives through constant dialogue and exchange of views were noted as the most rewarding part of the partnership. Firstly, constant dialogue was perceived as a way to gain understanding and build trust between the partners. Moreover, many have repeatedly mentioned that having an active discussion, asking questions, and providing answers related to the challenges of both municipality's interventions have provided various new aspects to work on and deal with practical issues. Interviewees stressed that this is a co-learning process where both had gained benefits in an equal manner.

"It's about putting our heads together for a greater cause. It doesn't matter if you are a developed country or not [...] we have the stuff to put at the table either way and contribute in a good way." (Interviewee 10 Sweden)

"This is beneficial for both municipalities as it provides a platform for the exchange of practical knowledge and helps to build practical solutions to the identified problem." (Interviewee 9 Zambia)

"It's quite different situations in different countries, but there are also similarities. And when you find these similarities, and how you adapt the programs to different circumstances, and you give feedback from very different perspectives, you can learn quite a lot and very quickly." (Interviewee 4 Sweden)

In general, this partnership helped both African and Swedish partners to step out of the box, consider various angles and discover new working styles inspired by the partnering municipality. Apart from this, some also pointed out that the feedback system has supported them move forward with their work and helped them to learn new things that can contribute to making a real change in their respective municipalities.

"In this partnership, you are taught in each and every stage of your development and give feedback to your partner [...] So, in that feedback, you'll be able to pick aspects that can be adopted or bring change. [...] So feedback system makes you check yourself in terms of where you're, or what is behind and how you can improve." (Interviewee1 Zambia)

7.2. The Power Dynamic and Relationship between the Partners

The relationship between the partners has been described as mutual and balanced by all interviewees. The position and engagement level of each partner appeared to be reciprocal, and both parties argued that they gained benefits by participating in this partnership. According to the interviews, it is inarguable that the power is shared between the African and Swedish municipalities in terms of preparation and operation process.

> *"Each one of us took the position and take their role. We have the call whereby we meet frequently, and then… we were there for each other to ensure implementation of the same. […] We all are at the 50:50 engagement in this partnership."* (Interviewee 7 Kenya)

One interviewee also stated that the relationship in this partnership is a two-way exchange, which is far from the 'traditional aid format' and has less tension between the partners. In addition, one also expressed the relationship as 'sparring partners', as they challenge each other, ask for opinions, and try to produce something that is beneficial for both cities.

Even though the municipal partnership seems to be based on mutuality, some have mentioned a few concerns regarding the imbalance of power. Three Swedish interviewees have expressed the possibility of permanent inequality of power-sharing as Swedish municipalities have full control over the budget, which shows similarity with previous studies. Although the power imbalance is less critical in this partnership, Swedish partners pinpointed that they will always have a certain power over their partners. Even though Swedish partners are doing their best to keep the transparency of budget allocation and expenditure, having control over the budget gave them a higher position.

> *"There is really a power difference. We (Swedish) have the budget […] I think that makes a sensitive situation. […] I try to have transparency around, for example, the project budget and get suggestions on how our partner would like to use this particular part… But in the end, I feel like we have the upper hand. So, I guess, it's not really a mutuality there."* (Interviewee 11 Sweden)

When it comes to the budget, only one African interviewee mentioned that there is inequality as their municipality is not receiving the finances directly from the ICLD but through their Swedish partners.

> *"The mutuality is almost equal in all aspects except where the local municipality does not directly receive finances from ICLD. We receive a share of the budget through the international partner. […] I think both municipalities should be given the same opportunity to handle finances"* (Interviewee 9 Zambia)

Another matter that was brought up by the Swedish interviewees was compensation. According to one interviewee, both the great and tricky thing about the municipal partnership was the mutuality. The Swedish local governments are not entitled to use their internal budget on international development works. Therefore, Swedish participants involved in this programme were funded from the MPP budget for their work, while partnering municipalities in Africa needed to make extra hours apart from their ordinary work to be able to participate in the partnership activities fully.

> *"The funding is more generous to the Swedish partners than the foreign partners. For instance, I get paid for my working hours in this programme, but our partners are not. So, it's a sort of unfair relationship, to begin with. [...] When you still want to create this sort of equal standing in the partnership, it's hard to say that we are equal… when we still… basically is a funding partner"*
> (Interviewee 8 Sweden)

Due to this, several Swedish interviewees expressed that they often end up having more suggestions on the table even though they want to have more input and views from their partners. Although all the decisions were made jointly, some Swedish participants still felt that they held more power as they had to suggest options to their partners to keep the work to the fixed timeline. However, another interviewee expressed that this is a double-edged sword as it brings an uneven distribution of the administrative work resulting in extra burden and responsibility for Sweden. Apart from the budget and workload, the language was also mentioned as a potential factor for power asymmetry, as the Swedish municipality and ICLD use the same language. One interviewee claimed that whatever they do, this partnership cannot be completely fair unless the structure or the system of partnership is changed.

7.3. Contribution of Municipal Partnership
7.3.1. Capacity Building

Generally, the learning and capacity-building practices in this partnership were basically based on the exchange of experiences and knowledge and not a transfer. Both municipalities from Africa and Sweden showed similarities when it came to the learning mechanism. Both parties defined visiting each other's municipality as the best learning means, as it enabled participants

to observe how certain techniques, systems and approaches are being implemented in the practical world.

> *"You learn better by seeing and experiencing things in reality than on theory or just talking to each other."* (Interviewee 3 Zambia)

> *"Seeing is believing. We don't want to sit only in workshops and talk... We want to be out in society and see examples that they can actually adapt and transform to their own circumstance."* (Interviewee 4 Sweden)

Similar to previous studies, the exchange of ideas and being exposed to different angles were recurrently mentioned as critical activities. Interacting with people from diverse backgrounds, expertise and skills appear to have provided both municipalities with unique viewpoints that can strengthen their capacity for future work. The knowledge sharing and comparing ideas have also appeared to assist both in reframing some of the current local activities and provided ideas for setting future strategies.

However, both Swedish and African municipalities showed dissimilarity in learning levels and outcomes, which is in line with previous research. Capacity building at a personal level was mentioned by both municipalities but had diverse types of learning. As for Sweden, observing another culture and reality made them reflect on their own reality but also on how they worked with similar difficulties at home ground. Furthermore, they have gained insights into global issues and started to think more about how to integrate them into their work. One interesting point that Swedish participants mentioned was the gain of motivation and energy that helped to make things happen by seeing the partnering municipality's action in the fields.

> *"Here it was, like, it gave us the like, energy to make things happen, in a practical way. We can't really compare systems or techniques as we are all set but focusing on how to move forward and make a change that was something that we also got inspired from by our partner. They don't hesitate in action…They just do! It's so inspiring."* (Interviewee 11 Sweden)

In the case of African municipalities, interviewees expressed that they have gained insights and practical skills that improve their regular work. Especially, improvement in their management

skills, such as mobilising resources and collaboration with various stakeholders, was mentioned multiple times, besides broadening of perspectives. Several respondents mentioned that there were certainly more technical knowledge transfers from Swedish municipalities as they are more advanced and experienced in certain systems and practices but not as much as other development initiatives.

> *"We tend to find Sweden being the best country in terms of sustainable practices and has good waste management systems. So, it creates a platform for learning in terms of the best practices, how did they start, what methodologies they used […] So, it ended up in capacity building because it brings in a unique aspect… but also, we get to learn new methods or approaches, so it strengthens and builds capacity."* (Interviewee 1 Zambia)

The study results showed that both Kenyan and Zambian municipalities had some structural changes based on the Swedish working system and cultures. For instance, some have mentioned that they have enhanced collaboration between different departments, and one Kenyan interviewee stated that their municipality had created a governmental environment with fewer gender boundaries inspired by their Swedish partner. However, Swedish municipalities have mentioned that this partnership did not bring any specific changes or capacity building at the organisational level. Some even stressed that not many in their municipalities were even aware of this partnership which was quite different from their partnering municipalities.

7.3.2. Impact on the Local Development

A few of the most notable benefits from this partnership mentioned by interviewees were continuity and localisation. According to the interviewees, as the programme objectives were self-defined and based on the actual local challenges, the learning outcomes and approaches developed during the partnership were easily aligned with other municipality work. Several interviewees mentioned that this partnership does not construct infrastructure or advanced systems for developing countries but supports the development of practical tools that can be used and integrated with each municipality's already existing system. Interviewees stressed that this might not result in fast improvement but can create a greater impact and ensure continuity.

"We didn't build anything or actually give anything... And it's not the quick and easy changes that are made. But it is about making a long-term change as you develop approaches based on local needs…" (Interviewee 5 Sweden)

For African municipalities, the localisation aspect was highly appreciated. Several interviewees pointed out that the best part of this partnership is that we do not need to follow what others have done but localise based on what we have learned from our partners.

"… this is about localising to ensure that change comes from within the municipality. Things that we do here are very localised. It's not something that you read hypothetically... [...] what we do here aligns with what our government is doing… so it's about making something that means to local and something that lasts…" (Interview 6 Kenya)

Another contribution of the municipal partnership repeatedly mentioned by the African respondents was being able to discover, communicate and build networks with local experts or enterprises. The focus of ICLD's MPP is to jointly develop approaches or methods that could enhance democratic participation in the local political process. Therefore, activities in this partnership often engaged local citizens related to inclusion issues, especially youth or women, to be able to identify the real needs. Moreover, this partnership also involved relevant external entities, where municipalities could identify various local resources within their work field and build a network which can be useful for future works and ensures continuity.

This kind of network building was also available partly due to limited funding being allocated to the actual implementation. According to a few African interviewees, this has encouraged them to search and mobilise existing local resources, stakeholders and platforms that can support their work in the longer term. Even though some have expressed the need for more funding from this partnership for the implementation, the majority stated that having a chance to identify local resources and actors with similar interests has been one of the useful gains for their work and local development.

"The limited budget gives us a bang into look at existing platforms within the municipalities where resource mobilisation can come in and help. It was an objective and ICLD partnership, but in the actual implementation on the ground,

we got support from different partners, not that it was the whole ICLD budget
that supported our efforts, but they opened it up to have linkages with other
actors that had the similar objectives." (Interviewee 1 Zambia)

7.4. Other findings

In this section, some of the findings that the respondents have raised as important parts for municipal partnership but also in their further development at the local level will be presented.

7.4.1. Role of Local Politicians

The importance of having politicians or decision-makers in the MPP was supported by several interviewees, particularly in terms of sustaining and prioritising certain issues for local development. In this partnership, politicians came down to the ground and faced reality. Some African members have expressed that due to politicians being directly involved, their working process has accelerated as no extra explanation was needed. Furthermore, some mentioned that this partnership helped local politicians to grasp and understand the fundamental issues within the municipality.

"… The partnership project does help […] in a way that this kind of engagement
where politicians are fully involved will change so many things. If they
understand the problem, they will know how difficult that issue is and how to
address these at different levels." (Pilot 1)

"As politicians are directly involved, it makes it easier to ask for the resources
and to sell the idea… Any programme that is to be implemented has to be passed
in the assembly by the politicians… and they all understand that there are needs."
(Interviewee 7 Kenya)

The importance of politicians' support in their continuous work was also stressed by a few Swedish participants. Two respondents have mentioned that certain issues or themes that were not prioritised previously gained attention due to the politicians having a deeper understanding. The direct involvement of politicians has brought positive effects on the project and local development as they started to observe and understand the problems with their own eyes.

7.4.2. Role of ICLD Core Values

Another point that interviewees mentioned as a major gain in this partnership programme was having a chance to learn the ICLD's core values (Appendix 5) and apply these aspects to their work. According to respondents, ICLD provides basic training on these values and also assists both partners in developing activities with a focus on these values. Several respondents from both Africa and Sweden have revealed that even though these aspects have been a part of their municipality strategies, it was often just stated in documents or not properly applied in the actual work. One Swedish interviewee commented that these values had made them reflect on their previous actions or their current works and also helped them to work more deeply with the questions such as transparency and inclusion.

> *"I think the fact this programme is resting on the core values… put the focus on those issue forces you to think and write your project with that on your mind. And this is really good because you are allowed to consider the core values in your work and try to tie them on a horizontal level to the project."* (Interviewee 2 Sweden)

> *"ICLD has involved these core values, and it has been very helpful. For example, 'what is the actual benefits of our work?' or promoting local democracy in both municipalities in a broad sense from these perspectives."* (Interviewee 4 Sweden)

The value of the core areas is also mentioned recurrently among African municipalities. One interviewee has expressed that these values are 'big silent or not pronounced in their ordinary work even though the importance is well-known' (Pilot 2). One other respondent also mentioned that their municipality has started to include at least one or two of these values when they are developing a new programme.

> *"I think within the municipality, issues of inclusiveness and participation haven't been there. But now, you make sure that you create an environment and have an inclusive policy which guides our programming to ensure those core areas. […] we try to emphasize these so that those critical issues are addressed, or they adhere to the service and our operations."* (Interviewee 1 Zambia)

Another interviewee emphasised that these values should be a basis for every work in every country as these are fundamental for achieving a meaningful development where the local needs are involved.

7.4.3. Potential Risks

The municipal partnership brings a unique relationship format as this is not a partnership between donor entities and a local government in the global South, which is often the case of traditional development cooperation. Including public administrators from municipalities as key actors, the municipal partnership provides better opportunities for mutual learning and exchanges, which can be beneficial for developing local development programmes (Bontenbal & van Lindert, 2006). However, in this study, some of the Swedish interviewees raised concerns about the potential risk related to civil servants being active players. As civil servants usually lack experience and understanding of international development cooperation, one has expressed concern about the potential harm or adverse effects that can be caused unintentionally.

> *"We are not professionals in development work. We are professionals in our municipal context. But yet, we have the role of managing a project that is supposed to benefit people also in the partner city. So, there are many risks involved, and I don't think we really addressed that enough. […] I think it's very important to know… how to go about, how to behave and how to be respectful. And also learn about the risks."* (Interviewee 11 Sweden)

As the MPP includes politicians or decision-makers from African municipalities, who have the power to make a change in their systems, the Swedish respondent emphasised the risk of misleading them. Apart from this, two other Swedish have mentioned the importance of having pre-training that can help them to understand the differences and be cautious about potential harms such as power balance issues that might be problematic in building a good partnership. However, it is interesting that none of the African partners in this study has brought up any potential risks.

8. Discussion

8.1. Is ICLD municipal partnership based on mutuality?

The relationship between development cooperation actors has always been criticised for being highly unilateral (Develtere et al., 2021). It has been widely argued that partnership-based cooperation will reduce inequality and lead to a mutual relationship between developed and developing countries. However, even with continuous efforts, previous research revealed limitations in achieving genuine mutuality. In line with this, the first research question aimed to examine how participants perceived the municipal partnership programme (MPP) in terms of mutuality. This question has been examined mostly by using the elements that describe the format of partnership (Table 2) but also the level of participation (Table 3).

The findings indicated that the partners from both Africa and Sweden perceived themselves as having equal tasks, roles and responsibilities regarding the project planning and implementation to a great extent. The equality between the partners is one of the elements that determine whether the partnership can be understood as mutual or not (Hately & Malhotra, 1997). Instead of following or accepting the fixed intervention predetermined by one partner, the MPP was understood as a platform where both partners, especially the Africans, could identify the 'real issue' that affects the regional development and residents' well-being by themselves. One of the major factors which hindered a balanced relationship between the partners was unidirectional support flow (Bontenbal, 2013). However, in this case, the openness to determine the project objective has created the ground for mutual learning and co-working, as many interviewees have pointed out. For the interviewees in this study, the mutuality in the MPP was not something just written in the documents or indicators for the evaluation but the real achievement.

Furthermore, the decision-making process between the partners was considered based on dialogues and agreements from both sides, rather than one partner making a full decision. The findings show that having an agreement or trying to keep the entire process based on mutual decisions might have caused a bit of delay but created an environment where everyone was willing to participate and work together. This also implies that this municipal partnership has a more horizontal structure than a vertical one, where one makes orders. This agrees with Abrahamsen's (2004) views that genuine partnership is not about one person or party having a dominant role but including the voice of all parties involved in the partnership. Additionally,

the importance of shared dialogue between the partners from an early stage has been understood as a necessary step in achieving a two-way partnership (Brinkerhoff, 2002b). The study results also illustrate that the constant dialogue between the partners has been noted as an essential component in building trust but also leads to both partners getting a better understanding and contributing things that can truly help one another.

One last unique point of this municipal partnership is that the entire programme is built from scratch by partners based on their own needs. Identifying common agenda based on mutuality is a fundamental component of forming a reciprocal partnership (Hately & Malhotra, 1997). However, even with its importance, this has rarely occurred in many previous municipal partnerships. As stated by Wilson and Johnson (2007), the previous municipal partnership was often based on professional similarities which each party was already working with rather than identifying or formulating a common ground. It is further argued that the knowledge gap between the professions or officers from the North and South hinders them from having a mutual relationship.

Previous studies argued that the huge dissimilarities in context, systems, and knowledge between the developed and developing countries had hindered partners from achieving mutuality as one partner often has more to offer (Jones & Blunt, 1999). Yet, this could be the opposite in the case of MPP, as both partners were not expecting or requiring a classic knowledge transfer. As mentioned, the fact that the relationship in MPP identifies shared challenges and promotes joint objectives and interests that both partners need to deal with could be something relatively new. The findings revealed that the huge differences between the partners actually created a ground for getting more engaged in the issues, observing deeper and actively finding new, innovative solutions for both instead of being dependent on one's previous solutions, which participants pointed out as most fascinating part of MPP.

8.2. Does ICLD municipal partnership bring balanced power between the partners?

The second research question refers to the power dynamic and relationship between the two partners. This question will be discussed based on the level of participation and a few previous studies that are presented in the literature reviews section.

The issue of imbalanced power between the developed and developing countries has been standing as long as the development cooperation history. The findings in this study show that understanding of power imbalance differs between the Swedish and African participants. In general, African municipalities have claimed that they have experienced balanced power-sharing between the two parties as they had the same roles and obligations as Sweden. The fact that African municipalities were able to be involved in the planning and implementation actively indicates a high participation level, which participants perceived as power being evenly shared. This aligns with Brinkerhoff's (2002b) statement that a great degree of participation results in a more equal distribution of power between the partners involved in the development practices.

The findings indicated that the Swedish municipalities also perceived balanced power between the partners but only in terms of project planning and implementation process. Similar to African participants, Swedish also understood the working process as equal participation from both parties with having a similar level of contribution to each other's work. However, Swedish participants have identified imbalanced power issues that can be critical for building a genuine and trust-based relationship. As Blagescu and Young (2005) argued, there will always be a power imbalance between the developed and developing countries as the developed generally have control over the resources, even in the partnership-based approach. This study showed that Swedish participants unwillingly held more power as they had control over the funding, which seemed problematic mostly from the Swedish point of view.

As the findings revealed, while almost all Swedish interviewees have mentioned the tension or unequal power between the partners, only one African participant has raised this issue. There can be several reasons why African participants did not mention much about the power imbalance. One can be that the African municipalities genuinely did not experience or sense inequality as their voices, opinions and actions were included in the whole process and were treated as equal actors. It could also be due to the fact that resource allocation and details on the expenses are being shared between the partners based on the clear guidelines from the ICLD. However, it could also be due to the fact that they are not holding any financial resources and might have felt uncomfortable bringing it up during the interview as it could cause negative consequences, which was unable to discover in this study.

Based on Brinkerhoff's (2002b) ideas on the level of participation (Table 3), an increased level of participation from the developing countries should bring a balanced power between the partners. Looking at the aspect of shared power, the MPP has a more equalised or mutual relationship between the partners as both Swedish and African partners are willing to share their power and responsibilities and are willing to adapt. However, in the case of MPP, even with the high degree of participation, it shows that the power imbalance still exists due to the structural issue. This kind of structural burden is often left without being properly addressed, as most research only emphasises the importance of donors or developed countries' roles in achieving power balance. The power imbalance would have been different or less between the partners if the financial resources were operated by the ICLD. However, this might have caused other kinds of power imbalance, maybe not between the partners but between the municipalities as a receiver and the host organisation as a provider.

8.3. How does partnership contribute to local development?

One of the most stated contributions is perhaps related to what has been already mentioned in the previous discussion. With the openness of this programme, participants were able to actively participate in building their own solutions that are locally appropriate and beneficial, which increased the possibilities of the solution being practical and having a longer impact. All the participants in this programme are municipality public officers who are well aware of the local situation, needs and agendas. Their voices being heard, and a high degree of involvement has minimised the risk of intervention being far from reality. The way that ICLD's municipal partnership is structured emphasises the importance of direct involvement from the local level, which aligns with the participatory development approach. The core of the participatory approach is to include people from a particular context and reality in identifying their own needs (Kelly & Westoby, 2018), to ensure that relevant and suitable approaches are being implemented. This is also in line with Bigsten and Tengstam (2015) and Mubita et al. (2017), who argue that finding a solution based on local involvement and active interaction is key to having continuity or sustainability.

The findings also indicated that learning outcomes and capacity building from this partnership provided features that can contribute to local development in the longer term. The results showed that the capacity building has resulted in improving their local public administration, especially in terms of their working relationship with other departments and the local

politicians. Before the MPP, the working style in African municipalities was based on a narrowed relationship where only teams or a department directly involved in the challenge worked on the issue. However, it is pointed out that both direct and indirect learning outcomes from this partnership have made them realise the importance of collaboration between the departments and brought changes in their working style as social challenges often require various sectors to work together. This kind of collaboration between the internal actors is expected to develop a holistic approach to tackling the local challenges and creating internal networks. The results of this study are opposite to what has been revealed in previous research, which points out that other municipal partnership often results in capacity building at the personal level but has limitations in bringing positive changes at the institutional level (de Villiers, 2009; Johnson & Wilson, 2009; van Ewijk, 2012). In addition to this, the direct involvement of local politicians in the MPP resulted in positive changes for long-term local development as politicians gained a deeper understanding of actual challenges at the local level and started to prioritise things that truly mattered to the locals. This is also the uniqueness of MPP that is not mentioned in other municipal partnership projects.

Apart from the internal changes, the findings also showed how ICLD's municipal partnership improved practical management skills, such as creating a local network or resource pool that can be used even after the project completion. As mentioned in the findings, this MPP involved not only public administrators but also local citizens, communities, and local organisations in their activities. This enabled African municipalities to discover, communicate and build a network with local experts or businesses within their work scope, which they will be able to cooperate in the future. Furthermore, knowing the resources they have locally, has been an advantage in sustainably expanding their work. It was also stressed that the combination of the knowledge and experience gathered through this MPP and the mobilised local resources would bring sustainable development at the local level, as there is no need for complete dependency on foreign funding. These findings align with Bontenbal and Lindert's (2011) view that knowledge and skills gained from the municipal partnership can be beneficial for local development activities as it contributes to strengthening the capacity building of local officers, which can be applied in different parts of local context and results in a long-term impact on the local level.

The analysis of this study has clearly shown the benefits of the MPP on a personal and organisational level. However, there is one more point that was only briefly mentioned by the

participants but has an important meaning to the local development: the impact on the local citizens. The importance of ICLD's core value has been stressed multiple times during this study due to its contribution to the strategies and plans of the municipality. These core values are expected to set a ground for the municipality to understand the crucial role of local participation and how to achieve meaningful participatory development at the local level by including the voices of local people. Based on this municipal partnership, participants are actually making efforts to move towards transformative participation, where locals can make opinions and decisions regarding their own local environment (White, 1996). The participatory approach in this municipal partnership can be understood as twofold: the active involvement of developing countries in the development process but also participatory development happening between the municipality and the local citizens or groups such as youth and women. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to see whether these values are being adapted to the municipality's local activities and if this leads to extensive inclusion of citizens that leads to sustainability or better outcomes.

8.4. Limitations

As this study only involved a limited number of partnerships from certain geographical areas, this might have limited the possibility of finding other factors or aspects that might be relevant for understanding the characteristics of the municipal partnership programme. Furthermore, attending a few actual partnership activities such as regular meetings or conferences might have also improved and deepened the understanding of how the relationship and operational dynamic works in practice. Moreover, this study only focused on individual participants' understanding and experiences, which means the actual outcomes or impact on the local level were not able to be fully observed. As the municipal partnership programme does not produce mid-term or final evaluation reports, there are limitations in grasping actual changes or impacts that are made at the local level. In order to understand the wider scope of the municipal partnership programme's contribution at the local level, it would be relevant also to include external actors who were involved in the activities. Moreover, as the role of politicians has been playing a critical role in attaining the sustainability of the municipal partnership programme, it would be great to include their perspective as well. Lastly, this study has focused on specific aspects of participatory development and partnership approaches to understand the complexity of municipal partnership, meaning a range of other factors might be left out without being discussed.

9. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine how partners from African and Swedish municipalities perceive municipal partnership in terms of mutuality, understand the relationship format and power dynamic between the partners and thereafter see what kind of contribution this partnership brings to the local level. The study findings have identified a few similarities with previous studies, such as the importance of dialogue in ensuring mutuality, different learning outcomes among the Swedish and African municipalities and partnership enhancing capacity both at personal and organisational levels. However, there has been a few aspects that were specifically seen in this particular municipal partnership.

The findings clearly show that the municipal partnership at ICLD is highly mutual in terms of evenly distributed roles and responsibilities, horizontal decision-making structure, and all participants being involved as leading actors. One notable point of the MPP is the openness where the challenges and programme objectives are defined amongst the participants based on their mutual interests. The fact that the entire programme, from the problem identification to the dissemination activities, is formulated and implemented by collaboration and agreement between the partners shows that this is a truly mutual relationship. In fact, the nature of ICLD's municipal partnership, which requires both partners to identify and agree on a common challenge, might be the factor that enhances mutuality, which is often absent in other municipal partnership cases and in traditional development cooperation. Yet, mutuality between the developed and developing countries needs a bit more than partners, especially the power holders willing to share their power. This study has shown that the ICLD framework and structure might have played a significant role in normatively guiding a more equal relationship between the partners.

Furthermore, the different perceptions between the African and Swedish partners on resource control and power imbalance are also worth noting. For Swedish participants, resource control has been concerned as a major issue that caused power imbalance between the partners, which only one African participant brought up as an issue. The reason behind this difference was unable to discover through this study, but this has guided us to understand how important it is for the partners with the resource or power to keep the transparency of expenses and allocate the resources based on the agreement to have a more balanced and mutual partnership.

In this thesis, the contribution of MPP to the local level was more notable in the African municipalities as it helped them to mobilise local resources and create networks with relevant local actors. Even though the MPP is not providing any financial benefits, the African municipalities considered that this has given them the opportunity to set the ground for long-term development. However, it is unclear to see in this study if the contributions make actual changes and how long the effects will last.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, future research is suggested to study the potential risks the municipal partnership can bring to the local development, which is briefly mentioned in the findings. Furthermore, studies on the role of the host organisation or how their framework influences the relationship between the partners are also needed. A comparison study between the ICLD and other organisations' municipal partnerships might be helpful in understanding the role and impact of ICLD's core values and frameworks in achieving a more balanced relationship.

References

Aagaard, P., & Eberhard Trykker, S. (2020). The road to partnerships in practice: Practical wisdom as an alternative to managerialism in NGO partnerships. *Development Policy Review*. *38*(2). 266–282. https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12427

Abrahamsen, R. (2004). The power of partnerships in global governance. *Third World Quarterly*. *25*(8). 1453–1467. https://doi.org/10.1080/0143659042000308465

Angeles, L., & Gurstein, P. (2000). Planning for participatory capacity development: The challenges of participation and North-South partnership in capacity building projects. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*. *21*(SPECIAL ISSUE). 447–478. https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2000.9669926

Bigsten, A., & Tengstam, S. (2015). International coordination and the effectiveness of aid. *World Development*. *69*. 75–85. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2013.12.021

Black, D. (2020). Development co-operation and the partnership–ownership nexus: Lessons from the Canada–Ghana experience. *Development Policy Review*. *38*(S1). O112–O132. https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12476

Blagescu, M., & Young, J. (2005). *Partnerships and accountability : current thinking and approaches among agencies supporting civil society organisations*. Overseas Development Institute.

Bliss, F., & Neumann, S. (2008). *Participation in International Development Discourse and Practice "State of the Art" and Challenges*. Institute for Development and Peace. University of Duisburg-Essen.

Bontenbal, M. (2009). Understanding North-South municipal partnership conditions for capacity development: A Dutch-Peruvian example. *Habitat International*. *33*(1). 100–105.

Bontenbal, M. C. (2013). Differences in learning practices and values in north-south city partnerships: Towards a broader understanding of mutuality. *Public Administration and Development*. *33*(2). 85–100. https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.1622

Bontenbal, M., & van Lindert, P. (2011). Municipal partnerships for local development in the Global South? Understanding connections and context from a translocal perspective. *International Development Planning Review*. *33*(4). 445–461. https://doi.org/10.3828/idpr.2011.23

Bontenbal, M., & van Lindert, P. (2006). Decentralised international cooperation: North-South municipal partnerships. In van Lindert, P., Titus, M. J, & Verkoren, O. (Eds.), *Development Matters: Geographical studies on development processes and policies*, Utrecht University, pp. 301–314

Brandt, W. (1980). *North-South: A program for survival – The report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues*. The MIT Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Thematic analysis*. American Psychological Association.

Brinkerhoff, J. M. (2002a). Assessing and improving partnership relationships and outcomes: a proposed framework. *Evaluation and Program Planning. 25*. 215–231. www.elsevier.com/locate/evalprogplan

Brinkerhoff, J. M. (2002b). *Partnership for International Development: rhetoric or results?* Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Brown, S. (2020). The Rise and Fall of the Aid Effectiveness Norm. *European Journal of Development Research. 32*(4). 1230–1248. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-020-00272-1

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods* (4th ed). Oxford University Press.

Chambers, R. (1994). The Origins and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal. *World Development. 22(7). 953-969*

Cornwall, A. (2002). *Beneficiary, Consumer, Citizen: Perspectives on Participation for Poverty Reduction*. Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th edition). Sage Publications.

De Villiers, J. C. (2009). Success factors and the city-to-city partnership management process – from strategy to alliance capability. *Habitat International. 33*(2). 149–156. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2008.10.018

Degnbol-Martinussen, J., & Engberg-Pedersen, P. (2003). *Aid: Understanding International Development Cooperation*. Zen Books.

Del Biondo, K. (2020). Moving beyond a donor-recipient relationship? Assessing the principle of partnership in the joint Africa–EU strategy. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies. 38*(2). 310–329. https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2018.1541503

Develtere, P., Huyse, H., & van Ongevalle, J. (2021). *International Development Cooperation Today: A radical shift towards a global paradigm*. Leuven University Press.

Devers-Kanoglu, U. (2009). Municipal partnerships and learning – Investigating a largely unexplored relationship. *Habitat International. 33*(2). 202–209. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2008.10.019

Eyben, R. (2013). Building Relationships in Development Cooperation: Traditional Donors and the Rising Powers. In *IDS Policy Briefings* (Issue 36). Institute of Development Studies.

Eyben, R., León, R., & Hossain, N. (2007). Participatory action research into donor-recipient relations: A case study. *Development in Practice. 17*(2). 167–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/09614520701195741

Fejerskov, A., Lundsgaarde, E., & Cold-Ravnkilde, S. (2016). *Uncovering the dynamics of interaction in development cooperation : a review of the "new actors in development" research agenda*. (No. 1 DIIS Working Paper). DIIS.

Fernández de Losada Passols, A., & Moreno, A. C. (2018). *Decentralised cooperation to achieve the 2030 Agenda Towards a new generation of multi-stakeholder partnerships*. www.cpmr.org

Glasbergen, P., Biermann, F., & Mol, A. P. J. (2007). *Partnerships, governance and sustainable development : reflections on theory and practice*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Grace, R. (2015). *Understanding Humanitarian Negotiation: Five Analytical Approaches*. Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. https://hhi.harvard.edu/files/humanitarianinitiative/files/understanding-humanitarian-negotiation-five-analytical-approaches-0.pdf?m=1610140590. Accessed 2022-05-13

Hafteck, P. (2003). An Introduction to Decentralized Cooperation: Definitions, Origins and Conceptual Mapping. Public Administration and Development. 23(4). 333-345. https://doi.org/10.l0O2/pad.286

Hammett, D., Twyman, C., & Graham, M. (2015). *Research and Fieldwork in Development*. Routledge.

Hasselskog, M., & Schierenbeck, I. (2017). The Ownership Paradox: Continuity and Change. In *Forum for Development Studies.* (Vol. 44, Issue 3). Pp. 323–333. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.1080/08039410.2017.1384530

Hately, L. C., & Malhotra, Kamal. (1997). *Between rhetoric and reality: essays on partnership in development*. Ottawa, North-South Institute.

Hatton, M. J., & Schroeder, K. (2007). Partnership theory and practice: Time for a new paradigm. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*. *28*(1). 157–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2007.9669192

Hewitt, W. E. T. (2002). Partnership as process: Municipal co-operation for international development. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*. *23*(2). 225–247. https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2002.9668864

Horner, R. (2020). Towards a new paradigm of global development? Beyond the limits of international development. *Progress in Human Geography*. *44*(3). 415–436. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132519836158

ICLD. (n.d.). *Municipal Partnership Programme*. https://icld.se/en/what-we-do/municipal-partnerships/. Accessed 2022-03-05

ICLD. (2020). *Municipal partnerships – How to initiate, plan, implement and follow up ICLD municipal partnerships*. Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy.

ICLD. (2021). *Guidelines for the Municipal Partnership Programme*. Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy.

Impey, K., & Overton, J. (2014). Developing partnerships: The assertion of local control of international development volunteers in South Africa. *Community Development Journal*. *49*(1). 111–128. https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bst016

Johnson, H., & Wilson, G. (2009). Learning and mutuality in municipal partnerships and beyond: A focus on northern partners. *Habitat International*. *33*(2). 210–217. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2008.10.013

Jones, A. (2016). Envisioning a Global Health Partnership Movement. *Globalization and Health*. *12*(1). 10–12. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-015-0138-4

Jones, M. L., & Blunt, P. (1999). "Twinning" as a method of sustainable institutional capacity building. *Public Administration and Development*. *19*. 381–402.

Keijzer, N., & Black, D. (2020). Special issue introduction Ownership in a post-aid effectiveness era: Comparative perspectives. *Development Policy Review*. *38*(S1). O1–O12. https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12490

Kelly, A., & Westoby, P. (2018). *Participatory Development Practice: Using traditional and contemporary frameworks*. Practical Action Publishing.

Mansuri, G., & Rao, V. (2013). *Localizing Development: Does Participation Work?*. Washington DC. The World Bank

Martella, P., & Schunk, J. (1997). Partnership: A new name in development cooperation. *Development in Practice. 7*(3*)*. 283-286

Maxwell, S., & Conway, T. (2000). *Perspectives on Partnership*. Washington DC. The World Bank. www.worldbank.org/html/oed

McEwan, C. (2019). *Postcolonialism, Decoloniality and Development*. Routledge.

McQuaid, R. W. (2007). The theory of partnership: Why have partnerships? In Osborne, S. (Ed.) *Public-Private Partnerships: Theory and Practice in International Perspective*. pp. 27-53. Routledge.

Michanek, E. (1971). *The World Development Plan: A Swedish Perspective*. Stockholm. Almqvist & Wiksell.

Minasyan, A. (2016). Your development or mine? Effects of donor-recipient cultural differences on the aid-growth nexus. *Journal of Comparative Economics*. *44*(2). 309–325. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2015.07.002

Mubita, A., Libati, M., & Mulonda, M. (2017). The Importance and Limitations of Participation in Development Projects and Programmes. *European Scientific Journal. 13*(5). 238. https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2017.v13n5p238

Nascimbeni, F. (2008). *Development Cooperation in the network society: Introducing the concept of networking for development*. Brussels. NETIS project.

Nawaz, F. (2013). Power, Empowerment and Participatory Development: Conceptual Linkages. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. *1*(2). 26–30. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2224366

Nganje, F. (2015). *Decentralized Cooperation and the New Development Cooperation Agenda: What Role for the UN?*. United Nations University Centre for Policy Research.

OECD. (n.d.). Country ownership of development: Political correctness or a practical key to better aid?. *OECD* Policy Brief No. 4. OECD.

OECD. (2015). *Development Co-operation Report 2015*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/dcr-2015-en

OECD. (2019). Decentralised development co-operation: Unlocking the potential of cities and regions. *OECD Development Policy Papers,* No. 22. Paris. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/e9703003-en

Parfitt, T. (2004). The ambiguity of participation: A qualified defence of participatory development. *Third World Quarterly*. *25*(3). 537–555. https://doi.org/10.1080/0143659042000191429

Park, J.-D. (2019). *Re-inventing Africa's Development: Linking Africa to the Korean Development Model*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Pearson, L. B. (1969). *Partners in Development*. Praeger Publishers.

Rahman, S. S., & Baranyi, S. (2018). Beyond binaries: constructing new development partnerships with middle-income countries. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*. *39*(2). 252–269. https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2017.1394275

Ramaswamy, R., Kallam, B., Kopic, D., Pujic, B., & Owen, M. D. (2016). Global health partnerships: Building multi-national collaborations to achieve lasting improvements in maternal and neonatal health. *Globalization and Health*. *12*(1). 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-016-0159-7

Schech, S., Mundkur, A., Skelton, T., & Kothari, U. (2015). New spaces of development partnership: Rethinking international volunteering. *Progress in Development Studies*. *15*(4). 358–370. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464993415592750

Schwittay, P., & Braund, A. (2019). Participation 2.0? Participation 2.0? Crowdsourcing Participatory Development @ DFID. *Information Technologies & International Development*. 15. 1-15

Sondermann, E., & Ulbert, C. (2021). Transformation through 'meaningful' partnership? SDG 17 as metagovernance norm and its global health implementation. *Politics and Governance*. *9*(1). 152–163. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v9i1.3656

Sonesson, K., & Nordén, B. (2020). We learnt a lot: Challenges and learning experiences in a southern African—north European municipal partnership on education for sustainable development. *Sustainability*. *12*(20). 1–25. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12208607

Stibbe, D., Reid, S., & Gilbert, J. (2018). *Maximising the impact of partnerships for the SDGs: A practical guide to partnership value creation*. The Partnering Initiative and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

Stott, L., & Murphy, D. F. (2020). An inclusive approach to partnerships for the SDGs: Using a relationship lens to explore the potential for transformational collaboration. *Sustainability. 12*(19). https://doi.org/10.3390/SU12197905

The Global Goals. (n.d.). *Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals.* https://www.globalgoals.org/17-partnerships-for-the-goals. Accessed 2021-10-09.

Turner, D. W. (2010). Qualitative interview design: A practical guide for novice investigators. *Qualitative Report. 15*(3). 754–760. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2010.1178

van Ewijk, E. (2008). *Decentralized cooperation between Dutch municipalities and municipalities in migrant countries: Main developments and main theoretical debates illustrated by several case studies.* Report for NCDO. Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies.
. http://www.ncdo.nl/docs/uploads/Onderzoeksrapport%2032.pdf. Accessed 2021-09-08

van Ewijk, E. (2012). Mutual learning in dutch-moroccan and Dutch-Turkish municipal partnerships. *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie. 103*(1). 101–109. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9663.2011.00698.x

van Ewijk, E., Baud, I., Bontenbal, M., Hordijk, M., van Lindert, P., Nijenhuis, G., & van Westen, G. (2015). Capacity development or new learning spaces through municipal international cooperation: Policy mobility at work? *Urban Studies. 52*(4). 756–774. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098014528057

van Lindert, P. (2009). Transnational linking of local governments: The consolidation of the Utrecht-León municipal partnership. *Habitat International. 33*(2). 173–180. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2008.10.015

Wescott, C., & Wessal, A. (2014). *How Effective are International Development Partnerships?* Conference of International Public Management Network. Budapest, Hungary. http://ssrn.com/abstract=2720925

White, S. C. (1996). Depoliticising development: The uses and abuses of participation. *Development in Practice. 6*(1). 6. https://doi.org/10.1080/0961452961000157564

Wilson, G., & Johnson, H. (2007). Knowledge, learning and practice in North-South practitioner-to-practitioner municipal partnerships. *Local Government Studies. 33*(2). 253–269. https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930701200544

Yin, R. K. (2016). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. The Guilford Press.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Information Sheet
Research Study Title:
"Municipal Partnership for Sustainable Development – Way to promote local development or another buzzword?"
Researcher: Da Sol, Jung (da.sol.jung@icld.se)
Supervisor: Christopher Mathieu (christopher.mathieu@soc.lu.se)

You are invited to participate in an interview for a study I am conducting as a part of my master's programme, International Development and Management, at Lund University. Before deciding whether to participate in this interview or not, please read the following information. If there is any question or unclear information while reading, please contact me.

Purpose:
This study aims to gather a deeper understanding and explore the concept 'municipal partnership' based on the stakeholders' perspective. The municipal partnership is perceived to bring sustainable changes and mutuality between the North and South partners in international development cooperation. However, the concept is still a relatively unexplored area. In this study, particular attention is drawn to how stakeholders perceive the municipal partnership in terms of its function and impact in the local development; benefits and challenges in achieving sustainable development and mutuality.

Do you have to participate?
Participating in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to take part or to answer any question. You can also withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

What does it mean to participate?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be invited to a semi-structured interview over a digital platform such as Zoom or Microsoft teams. The interview duration will be around 60 minutes, depending on your availability and the level of information you would like to share.

How will information be handled?
The interview will be recorded upon your agreement and will be transcribed. All information gathered will not be identifiable if you wish to remain anonymous. All the personal information will be coded if requested.

All recordings and transcribed documents will be stored confidentially. No one other than the researcher and supervisor will have direct access to the recordings or documents. The recordings will be erased once the transcription is completed. The data will be used for the thesis, which can result in some quotes being shared during the thesis examination.

If you have any further questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me at any time.
Thank you for reading this information and consider participating.

Appendix 2. Interview Consent Form

Research Study Title:
"Municipal Partnership for Sustainable Development – Way to promote local development or another buzzword?"

This form is to confirm that you have understood the purpose of the study, what is involved in the interview and agrees to take part. Please read carefully and check each box to indicate your agreement.

Question	Check upon agreement
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project.	
I have had sufficient time to consider the presented information and asked for further information and satisfied with the information I have received about this interview.	
I understand who will have access to interview and understand how and for how long the data will be stored.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
I consent to the processing of my personal information (name, title, organisation etc.) for the purpose of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated with strict confidentiality.	
I agree to being recorded and understand that recorded interview will be used for research analysis.	
I understand that my words may be quoted in publication (in this case in the thesis).	
I agree to be identifiable with my real name, organisation, or geographical location.	
I do not agree to be identifiable with above characteristics and prefer to be anonymised.	
Hereby, I agree to take part in the above research study	

Participant's Name:

_____

Participant's Signature:

_____

Date:

_____

Appendix 3. Interview Guide (International Partners)

This interview guide provides an overview of the main questions that will be asked during the interview. The interviews will be approximately 60 minutes, depending on the level of information that the respondents wish to share. The questions are categorised into five sections. Additionally, there will be several following questions tailored to specific respondents based on the given answers.

Section 1. General Questions

1. Can you briefly talk about your role within your organisation and in this Municipal Partnership Programme?
2. How did your municipality decided to be involved in this programme?
3. Have you had other municipal partnership before?
   a. What kind of?

Section 2. Meaning of MPP for local

1. How would you define Municipal Partnership?
2. What does it mean for your municipalities to be part of such programme?
3. How does the activities in Municipal Partnership Programme helps to deal with your local problem, issues (in organisational or societal level)?
4. In your opinion, why is the partnership between the municipalities important in (international) development cooperation?
5. How does this partnership differ from other previous development cooperation partnership?

Section 3. Impact of the MPP

1. Why is Municipal Partnership important for local development?
2. How does the Municipal Partnership influence local development?
3. How does the contribution of this programme differ from other development cooperation/partnerships had for your municipality?
4. What kind of meaning or effects do you think Municipal Partnership has for sustainable development?

Section 4. Mutuality

1. How would you describe the relationship between two municipalities during this programme?
2. What kind of benefits does Municipal Partnership brings to your municipality?
3. Do you think the Municipal Partnership is beneficial for both municipalities?
    a. In what way? Any example?
4. In your view, is there anything that needs to be considered or changed to ensure the mutual benefits for both partners?

Section 5. Closing Questions
1. What kind of meaning does partnership between the municipalities between Global South-North has for the development cooperation?
2. Are there any additional comments or questions that you would like to make?

Appendix 4. Interview Guide (Swedish Partners)

This interview guide provides an overview of the main questions that will be asked during the interview. The interviews will be approximately 60 minutes, depending on the level of information that the respondents wish to share. The questions are categorised into five sections. Additionally, there will be several following questions tailored to specific respondents based on the given answers.

Section 1. General Questions

1. Can you briefly talk about your role within your organisation and in this Municipal Partnership Programme?
2. How did your municipality decided to be involved in this programme?
3. Have you had other municipal partnership except the ones from ICLD?

Section 2. Meaning of MPP for local

1. How would you define Municipal Partnership Programme?
2. What does it mean for your municipalities to be part of such programme?
3. How has building a partnership with the Kenyan/Zambian municipalities helped your municipality in identifying or dealing with local problems/issues?
4. How do you think this kind of partnership programme is helpful for your partnering municipality?

Section 3. Impact of the MPP

1. How does the Municipal Partnership influence the local development of your municipality?
2. How does activities or contribution of this programme differ from other development cooperation/partnership had for your municipality?
3. In your view, do you think this programme has significant meaning or effects on sustainable development?
4. How has this programme contributed to the sustainable development of your city?

Section 4. Mutuality

1. How would you define the relationship between two municipalities during this programme?

2. In your view, does the municipal partnership programme brings any specific benefits to your municipality (or to one municipality only)?

3. In your view, what is the beauty or advantages of having a municipal partnership between the so-called Global South-North?

4. Is there anything that needs to be considered or changed to ensure the mutual benefits for both partners?

Section 5. Closing Questions

1. What kind of meaning does the partnership between the municipalities between Global South-North has for the development cooperation?

2. Are there any additional comments or questions that you would like to make?

Appendix 5. ICLD's Core Values

The core values of ICLD are considered a foundation for the local democracy, and it highlights four areas: equality, participation, transparency, and accountability. Details of each area are as follows:

- **Equality**

Citizens should be treated inclusively and fairly. All citizens shall have an equal opportunity to express their needs and be paid attention to in line with their different requirements. Measures to ensure the absence of discrimination and harassment, and which show consideration for vulnerable groups' needs, with a special focus on the position of women, are all examples of measures that should be regarded as factors for success.

- **Participation**

Local and regional politically run organisations have a responsibility to actively promote a high level of participation in local decision-making processes that relate to the structuring of public sector activities and services. Different ways of increasing participation in the decision-making processes is key, but identifying ways of exerting influence on important substantive issues is equally critical. Steps in the right direction include the development of instruments that increase dialogue and responsiveness and improve adaptation in line with citizens' needs.

- **Transparency**

Openness in decision-making, in decision-making processes, in planning, and in policy formulation in public sector operations are all key importance in enabling people to participate in local issues in an informed way, and are, therefore, another key area of a socially sustainable, local democracy. For citizens, increased transparency means that politicians and administrative personnel act openly and predictably. Measures that ensure increased insight, openness and predictability are, therefore, desirable in strengthening local democracy.

- **Accountability**

Clarity in power and responsibility relationships is a prerequisite of a well-functioning democracy. The potential for sanctions and accountability must exist. It is not always possible for citizens to play a direct role in decision-making and responsibility must, therefore, be made visible so that it can be demanded during ongoing processes and not just in conjunction with elections. Providing information that shows how decisions are taken, who is responsible, how citizens can appeal decisions, and which gives them the opportunity to find out what the consequences are when mistakes are made is, for ICLD, a sign that the organisations are enhancing the citizens' ability to demand accountability.

(Source: https://icld.se/en/about-us/icld-core-values/)