

## Functions of Local Governments for the Implementation of Sustainable Development: The Case of Turkey

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**Abstract:** The term “Sustainable Development” was used for the first time in 1987 by Brundtland Report known as “Our Common Future”. Being about meeting the needs of today without diminishing the capacity of future generations to meet their needs, sustainable development is the most important common goal of human being today.

There have been many international efforts to reach this common goal since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. This conference established a connection between Sustainable Development and Local Governments in its main concluding document Agenda 21. Titled as “Local Authorities’ Initiatives in Support of Agenda 21”, Chapter 28 of this document calls each local authority to enter into a dialogue with its citizens, local organizations and private enterprises and adopt “a Local Agenda 21”. In accordance with this call, the Local Agenda 21 Program has been carried out in thousands of cities all over the world, including Turkey. In this country, local governments especially municipalities provide several services to their inhabitants to ensure Sustainable Development in their cities on the basis of the related legislation.

This study aims to examine the functions of local governments towards Sustainable Development. In doing so, the study depends on the case of Turkey.

**Keywords:** Environmental Problems, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Urban Development, Local Agenda 21, Local Governments.

### Introduction

Environmental movement which is started in 1970’s and intensified 1980’s; spread national levels to international level. Environmentalism initially considered as “pollution” later on assessed in a wider and holistic perspective. While these developments are taking place in the sense of environmental protectionism and development international solidarity and cooperation is started take place in international agendas. (Toprak Karaman, 1998: 47).

It seems that the belief “economic developments, with the support of technologic developments, are an indicator of wealth of societies” does not seem like a valid belief. Multiple negative affect of economical activities in the nature and artificial environment indicates that plain economical development is not alone a factor of economical development and reminded to the mankind that the economical development should go along with the social and ecological development. Now unlimited development does not accepted and while “sustainable” economical social and environmental objectives are actualized, there is need of local, national and international strategies should be (is) embraced. (Palabiyik, 2005: 611).

### Sustainable Development

With the discussion of global problems such as: global warming, vanishing of rain forests and hunger, sustainable development come into the global agenda. Today, sustainable development is acknowledged as along term concept with the dimensions of economical social and ecological developments. (Adaman et al, 2004: 129-130).

The concept of sustainable development consists of two components: “sustainability” and “development”.

Sustainable development relays on the idea of sustainability. It can simply be described as: “ability of something’s to survive”. Some of the scientists describing sustainability as: a procedure which should provide minimum level of protection to social, economical and environmental (ecological) systems need. Some others mention the “edge of sustainability”. Edge of sustainability is described as: the usage of sources with a minimum balanced level which can fulfill the mankind’s need today and in the future. If this edge is crossed “unsustainability” occurs. (Bozlağan, 2002: 58).

Development is a term which has subjective elements and is difficult to describe and definitions varies in according to different people. But generally can be described as “activities which provide an increase in welfare”. But since it is difficult to measure the level of increase in welfare, in a narrow sense, it can be defined as “per capita national income”. In the literature, some of the writers mentioned the humanitarian perspective of development such as human rights, local and international democracy, reaching full employment rate, housing, health and ability to have basic infrastructure services and having enough natural sources etc., (Bozlağan, 2002, 58).

### **Sustainable Development and Its Content**

In general, sustainable development is a balance between the mankind and the nature which does not exploit the sources of nature for the needs of next generations’ and existing society’ needs. These definitions puts forward certain subjects like: usage of limited sources, change, limitation of consumption, protection of land, appliance of democracy, providing justice in between the generations and providing basic needs of mankind (Palabıyık, 2005: 615).

One of the most widely known definitions of sustainable development is Brundtland and Commission’s definition: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Even though this definition is a bit short, it contains such a wide meaning in it including economical, social and ecological life’s aspects. This report mainly concentrates on balancing the needs of existing society’s needs and the needs of next generations needs without harming the nature. In Brundtland’s report the term “need” is used with a larger meaning which contains all aspects of socioeconomic life. In other words, the term “need” is used for individuals’ and society’s social, economical, ecological needs and the needs of alive and/or un-alive sources. There are two key opinions to be investigated in this definition (Bozlağan, 2002: 60):

- All the needs of individuals’ should be met in a safe and suitable way. Priorities should be paid to the poor people in today’s world where many people’s basic needs have not been met.
- The usage of sources should be limited in a way that would secure needs of today and future by the technologic, social organizational and limitations.

Therefore, nations should give up destructive growth and development strategies and try to implement more sustainable growth strategies in a short time.

Additionally, efficient participation of citizens to decision making process should be guaranteed, economical system should be developed in way that would produce technological information and stable output, social system should be able solve the problems related to tensions because of inconvenient development, manufacturing system should be able to respect to ecological protection systems, technologic system should be able to provide new solutions, international system should be able to support sustainable systems in trade and finance and finally, a system which has abilities to restructure it self, should be established. (Bozlağan, 2002: 60).

### **Local Governments and Sustainable Urban Development**

Sustainable Urban Development expresses implementation of sustainable development the principle for the purpose of improving the life standards the people living in the cities (Palabıyık, 2005: 617). During the preparatory meetings for the Urban 21 Conference (Berlin, July 2000), the following definition was developed for Sustainable Urban Development: “Improving the quality of life in a city, including ecological, cultural, political, institutional, social and economic components without leaving a burden on the future generations<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, an unsustainable urban can be defined as the places where the physical environment was destroyed and polluted so that it threats human life; the places which have an economy with inefficient and insufficient infrastructure and also not supporting the expectations of people to increase the welfare and the quality of life; the places in which there is increasing tension, crime, alienation, as a result migration (Palabıyık, 2005: 620).

There are different opinions about the necessary factors for sustainable urban development or possibility to attain it. For some views, it is impossible or only a utopia, but for some others, it is an unavoidable necessity. Some people think that cities are under unsustainable conditions because of heavy consumption, unplanned growth, intensive environmental distortions, excessive use of resources, deep inequalities among social classes. Nevertheless, cities are places where people wish to live with its successful local governments and attractive features beyond everything. Most of the cities may be much better places to live in with the available technological facilities as well as citizens’ ecological attitudes and values (Palabıyık, 2005: 617)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SustainableCities/What.html>, 20.05.2009.

Although sustainable development is seen as a global aim, each community/society needs to develop its own concrete policies in the direction of its own necessities to attain this goal. It is more rational to undertake the sustainability in harmony at the local, regional, national and international levels. Given that more than half of the world population and about 80% of European Union population live in cities, it can be easily stated that they are the most important places to implement sustainable development. In fact, with their strong cultural and economic power, cities have important advantages for reaching the sustainability goals by the societies (Palabiyik, 2005: 619).

Local governments may be the most important actors to ensure the sustainable development and especially the urban sustainability or sustainable urban development. Being the closest units of public administrations to public, providing efficient and productive local public services, and improving and settling local democracy, local governments have privileged position in the public administration system. When this position of local governments has been thought, it is basic and natural for them to undertake a dominant role in the success of urban sustainability, too. By ensuring local sustainability through the natural resource management, urban development, management of pollution, public health, public services, and education, local governments also contribute to national sustainability (Gökçeer, 1994: 27-28).

Basic strategies that local governments should follow to ensure sustainable development may be listed as follows:

- To use the indicators for sustainable development in the developing environmental targets,
- To put the sustainable development as the main aim in designing Urban Development Policies,
- To develop environmental protection and management systems to protect and improve the environment,
- To develop environmental inventory approaches,
- To introduce and spread the environmental protection policies and programs to the public,
- To get communicated and cooperated with international institutions about sustainable development.

Local governments, which have the responsibilities in designing and implementing policies, especially in the local areas, have to mobilize their available resources towards the goal of sustainable development. It is obvious that the central governments also have to undertake various responsibilities towards the same goal. The most tops of these responsibilities include:

- To give flexibility and fiscal autonomy to the local governments in their environmentally friendly enterprises and plannings,
- To guide the local governments in both increasing the quality of urban life and using resources,
- To support the field and transportation plans of the local governments, which are for sustainable development,
- To protect the sustainable development strategy in all central planning policies,
- To adopt the legislation and economic mechanism regarding the environmentally friendly enterprises,
- To support and encourage the projects which take care of cleaner and rational use of resources,
- To develop objective criteria and systems for all economic sectors to make the environmental inventory and monitor the developments,
- To ensure relationships and partnerships among the main sectors and channel these into sustainable development and speed up the development (Gökçeer, 1994: 28):

In recent years, the relationship between the global and local process related to the sustainable development is noticed, and the importance of bringing forward the sustainable development in the local and regional level as an aim is stressed. Particularly, in various formal declarations, such as in Rio in 1992, at Habitat II in İstanbul in 1996, in Johannesburg in 2002, it is indicated that the local governments are very important in the application of sustainable development policies successfully (Adaman and et al., 2004: 130).

## **Sustainable Development and Local Agenda 21**

Agenda 21, an output of United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, is defined as action plan which is the ultimate expression of global consensus and politic commitments towards achieving “sustainable development” that aims to create a balance between development and environment (Kavili Arap, 2004: 163). Agenda 21 brings forward “global partnership” as an indispensable method to reach the goal of “sustainable development”. Because environmental and urban problems have the characteristics of locality, it is necessary to make efforts locally to prevent the problems before they appear or to solve them as soon as they appear. This is a natural result of both conventional decentralization approach and the principle of “providing services by administrative units closest to the public”. The declaration of Agenda 21 is a result of the efforts to build up arrangements on that sense and by this declaration, the duties assigned to local administration and compatriots have been overemphasized (Adıgüzel, 2003: 50).

Local Agenda 21 (LA-21) can be defined as a participatory process with multiple agents aiming to reach the targets of Agenda 21 in local level by means of preparation of a long term strategic plan for developing solutions

to the problems in front of sustainable development and for their implementation (Sağır, 2003:32). The emergence of Local Agenda 21 is related to the process of turning the balance against environment which already exists in human-environment relation. In this process people realize the changing balance between human and environment. Due to the global importance of the problem, humanity initiated solution processes by international organizations (especially United Nations). The first important step of the solution processes was the Stockholm Conference held in 1972. The historical process that lasted since then to Johannesburg Summit in 2002 can be summarized as follows (Emrealp, 2005: 13-25):

*The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Conference-1972):*

The term of “sustainable development” was first defined in the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in June 1972 in Stockholm, Sweden. Three principles stated in the Stockholm Declaration as looking after intergeneration equity in using resources, connecting economic and social development with environment and emphasizing the coexistence of development and environment have formed basis for “sustainable development”. The importance and function of participation was also mentioned for the first time in the international documents by this conference, though it was stated in a weak manner.

*The United Nations convened the Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Vancouver-1976):*

It became apparent in the UN Habitat I Conference, held in 1976 in Vancouver, Canada, that the policy which only the central authorities can be an object of the UN has steadily bankrupted. At this stage, it came out that international solutions needs involvement of local governments and non governmental organizations. This new expansion resulted in accepting local governments and non governmental organizations as indispensable “partners” at the international level.

*The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development “Earth Summit” (Rio de Janeiro-1992):*

The starting point of Agenda 21 was the UN Conference on Environment and Development, so-called “Earth Summit”. This Summit not only put the sustainable development into our life but also enabled the adoption of participatory mechanisms and processes (Toprak Karaman, 1999:60).

*United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), (Cairo-1994):*

The first important summit following the Rio Conference was held in 1994 in Cairo, the capital of Egypt. The Cairo Conference focused on Chapter 5 of Agenda 21 titled “Demographic Dynamics and Sustainability”.

*World Summit for Social Development Copenhagen (Copenhagen-1995):*

The UN Social Development Conference was held in March 1995 in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark. The conference focused primarily on the Chapter 3 titled “Combating Poverty” and other several subjects dealt with in Agenda 21. The importance of setting up “partnerships” was emphasized in the main chapters of the Action Plan adopted in the conference. A global belief that democracy and a transparent and accountable governance and administration are the indispensable basis of a social and human-centered sustainable development is expressed especially in Chapter 5.

*The United Nations’ Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing-1995):*

Chapter 24 of the Agenda 21 carries the title of “Global Action for Women towards Sustainable and Equitable Development”. In this section, the importance of participation of women in all development activities in full, equal and most useful way was underlined. To ensure this target, various action plans and agreements adopted by the international community. Fourth World Conference on Women Beijing Declaration<sup>1</sup> argued that women participaton in the process of economic and social development, equality of opportunity and as practitioners and beneficiaries of people-centered sustainable development full and equal participation of women and man take place in this process.

*United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) (İstanbul-1996):*

Recognition of Agenda 21 in Turkey has been largely through the UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) held in Istanbul in 1996. At the Habitat Agenda, it was indicated that the indispensable foundation of the sustainable development based on democratic, respect for human rights, transparent, participant and accountable governance features. Thus, the principles of good governance for the 21st century were formulated in this conference. The Habitat Agenda ended with ephasis that pre-condition of the success of this agenda depends on the participation of local governments, civil society organizations and active participation of other local actors. City Summit was strengthened and riched the movement of LA-21 launched in Rio by underlining the “facilitator” role of the management, by highlighting the basic principles of good governance, and by encouraging cooperation of local governments, civil society and the private sector.

*United Nations Millennium (Millennium) Declaration (New York-2000):*

Issued on 6-8 September 2000 at the United Nations’ Headquarter in New York, the United Nations Millennium Declaration as one of the accepted document of today’s most powerful global commitment and priority was signed by the heads of state and government of 189 countries, including Turkey at the beginning of a new millennium. In this declaration, eight goals<sup>2</sup> were set to be reached by 2015 for development and poverty

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/declar.htm>, 28.04.2009.

<sup>2</sup> “Eight Millenium Development Goals” are:

reduction. LA-21's have a vital function in the achievement of these goals. The large parts of the document, namely "Development and Poverty Reduction", "Protection of Common Environment", "Human Rights", "Democracy" and "Good Governance" are directly related to LA-21 processes.

*United Nations the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) (Johannesburg-2002):*

Being the first global conference of 21st century, the UN World Sustainable Development Summit was held on 26 August-4 September 2002 in Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa. It was also the first international conference that was named after the term "sustainable development". It is known commonly as Rio+10 as it aimed to assess the Agenda 21 processes started by Rio Conference in 1992.

As two main outputs (results) of the summit "Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development"<sup>1</sup> and the "Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development" have been adopted at the summit. In Johannesburg Sustainable Development Declaration, global commitments to the goal (objective) of sustainable development are repeated, the importance of partnerships is expressed and importance of application is emphasised. Moreover, despite the "best practice" examples of world-scale and well-intentioned efforts, it is argued that very limited and inadequate achievements have been obtained in the evaluation of success of Agenda 21 from ten-year period after the Rio Summit. In various parts of the Local Governments Dialogue Report which took place among the UN documents offered to the Johannesburg Summit, the major steps taken at the local level are mentioned about implementation of Agenda 21. The Report pointed out that LA-21s were the most efficient and stable output of the Rio Conference.

### **Local Agenda 21: Rise and Scope**

Local Agenda 21 (LA-21), that aiming to reaching Agenda 21 targets on the local base via preparation and application of a long-term strategic plan which oriented primarily toward the solution of sustainable development problems, is a participative and multi-sectoral process (Kaya, 2007: 180). This process colored with volunteerism principle, is a loosely organized civil initiative movement and does not depend to any institution whatsoever. "City Councils", "City General Assemblies" and the like that main vehicles of LA-21 are constituted via city public institutions NGOs and shared participation of city-dwellers (Adıgüzel, 2003: 51). At "UN Environment and development conference" the world summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, in the scope of Agenda 21 that is welcomed by UN as an application program for sustainable development, LA-21 program included as well. These arguments are placed in 28th chapter of Agenda 21 titled "Local Authorities Initiatives in Support of Agenda 21":

"Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives. Local authorities construct, operate and maintain economic, social and environmental infrastructure, oversee planning processes, establish local environmental policies and regulations, and assist in implementing national and subnational environmental policies. As the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development."<sup>2</sup>

Four main targets are put in place in corresponding chapter: As a first target, every single local authority in all countries is supposed to start a participative process with their own communities and constitute a consensus regarding a LA-21 for their cities. Secondly, cooperation is encouraged between international community and local authorities as well as cooperation amongst local authorities at international scope. Thirdly, in order to enhance experience and knowledge/information sharing coordination and cooperation level are targeted to be increased between local authorities and other representatives of local authorities.

The last but of course not the least, programs aiming to effective participation of women and young people to the process of decision making, planning and implementation are encouraged at all local authorities in the world.

The following objectives are proposed for this programme area:

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- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
  - Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
  - Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
  - Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
  - Goal 5: Improve maternal health
  - Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
  - Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
  - Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>, 11.05.2009.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un-documents.net/jburgpln.htm>, 21.05.2009.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/english/agenda21chapter28.htm>, 03.05.2009.

- (a) By 1996, most local authorities in each country should have undertaken a consultative process with their populations and achieved a consensus on “a local Agenda 21” for the community;
- (b) By 1993, the international community should have initiated a consultative process aimed at increasing cooperation between local authorities;
- (c) By 1994, representatives of associations of cities and other local authorities should have increased levels of cooperation and coordination with the goal of enhancing the exchange of information and experience among local authorities;
- (d) All local authorities in each country should be encouraged to implement and monitor programmes which aim at ensuring that women and youth are represented in decision-making, planning and implementation processes.

Every single local organization is encouraged to develop their own LA-21s in cooperation with private sector institutions, local authorities, fellow countrymen and local management authority at the framework of reaching at targets that specified at 28th chapter of Agenda 21.

Each local authority should enter into a dialogue with its citizens, local organizations and private enterprises and adopt “a local Agenda 21”. Through consultation and consensus-building, local authorities would learn from citizens and from local, civic, community, business and industrial organizations and acquire the information needed for formulating the best strategies.

At the process that starting from 1992 the world summit in which LA-21 emerged, to 2002 Johannesburg UN world sustainable development summit, a number of universal UN conferences and summits are carried out. These organizations result in the widespread acceptance of LA-21s, which are local projections of “universal partnership”, and became the international pillar of this process. LA-21 is essentially a vision development aimed at city’s sustainable future and subsequently suggests that a strategic, long-termed local action plans’ preparation and implementation that makes the vision to be carried out.

LA-21 process is supposed to be open to all parts of society whether it be organized or not and stimulate participative policies and mechanism. Development of a governance approach based on various participative mechanism and local partnership is crucially important (Kaya, 2007: 181-182).

## **Local Agenda 21 Practices in the World**

LA-21 has been implementing across the world in 135 countries since 1992. Even “LA-21” concept is directly not used; city numbers that participate to this process under similar names (Sustainable Cities Programs, Healty Cities Program etc.) are being increased day by day.

UN development program, which is the coordinator of LA-21 at world scope, supports LA-21 processes that were accepted by around 85 countries that contains Turkey as well. LA-21 initiatives as of Rio and Johannesburg Summits are being accepted by UN as the most successful activities that provides local participation.

The outcome of Local Agenda 21 implementations since the Rio Summit finds its paramount expression in the report entitled “Implementing Agenda 21: Report of the Secretary-General”, prepared by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan for WSSD - the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in 2002 in Johannesburg, which underlines that “At the local level, the most successful umbrella for participation has been the local Agenda 21 initiatives” (UNDP, 2006: 2).

In addition, at Johannesburg Summit where “Local Authorities Dialog Report” is presented to UN, it is pointed out that local authorities have answered effectively to the Agenda-21 thanks to LA-21 (Kaya, 2007: 184-185)

Aalborg Charter has been signed after first European sustainable cities and towns conferences held in Aalborg/Denmark between May 24-27th 1994. With this charter, in the framework of LA-21, in reaching sustainable cities and towns a campaign starting point which supposed to be implemented at local and regional level in Europe has been constituted.

City authorities that signed the charter have made commitments of performing actions placed in the charter in order to have more sustainable cities.

The Lisboa Action Plan: from Charter to Action , that projects more tangible steps in order to reach sustainable cities and towns, and that has been held in Lisboa at October 1996, has been constituted.

After the third European conference on sustainable cities and towns occurred in Hannover, Germany, on 9-12 February 2000, in June 2004 again under the hostings of Aalborg a conference, Aalborg Commitment (Aalborg+10) statement has been accepted and opened to signature.

On March 21-24, 2007 at fifth conference held in Spain/Sevilla (Sevilla 2007 Fifth European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns: Taking the Commitments to the Streets) according to signature listing around 2500 local authorities in more than 40 countries (for example, 1084 municipalities in Spain, 833 municipalities in Italy) have signed Aalborg Charter. Turkey has 7 municipal signatures of it. Furthermore, Çorum Governorship and Marmara and Vicinity Municipalities Association signed it provisionally. The Aalborg Commitments declared in 2004 has not yet been signed by Turkey.

1994 Aalborg Charter that charter of European cities and towns towards sustainability and similar attempts are strong evidence that LA-21s are very important in Europe. European Union carefully supervises candidate countries practises about LA-21. So, activities in Turkey that are undertaken in the framework of LA-21 bears vital importance.

## **Local Agenda 21 Practices in Turkey**

As a response to the call made to local governments in Chapter 28 of the Agenda 21, LA-21 Program have been implemented in thousands of cities around 14 countries since 1992. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the coordinator organization for Agenda 21 over the world supports LA-21 processes in 85 countries, including Turkey. Today, LA-21 practices in Turkey are being carried out by the support of UNDP and under the coordination of United Cities and Local Governments, Middle East and West Asia (UCLG-MEWA). The priority and importance should be given to the openness of LA-21 for the participation of both organized and non-organized social sectors and to the development of policies and mechanisms encouraging participation. Turkey LA-21 Program is open to all local governments, except for village administrations. A total of 71 local governments<sup>1</sup> from different geographical regions are partners to this program as of April 2009, including 10 metropolitan municipalities, 1 special provincial administration, 21 provincial municipalities, and 39 town and district municipalities.

### **Phases of Local Agenda 21 (LA-21) Programme in Turkey<sup>2</sup>**

Turkey LA-21 Program has been carried out in four phases since 1997 when it started. The developments in each phase can be summarized briefly as follows.

#### ***Phase I - Promotion and Development of Local Agenda 21s in Turkey (1997-1999)***

This is the phase on which the LA-21 processes in Turkey were launched in late 1997 via the project entitled "Promotion and Development of Local Agenda 21s in Turkey", with the support of UNDP and under the coordination of International Union of Local Authorities Section for the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East (IULA-EMME). This project was successfully completed in December 1999.

#### ***Phase II - Implementing Local Agenda 21s in Turkey (2000-2003)***

In this phase, following the success of the first project, a new project entitled "Implementing Local Agenda 21s in Turkey" started in January 2000. The overall purpose of the Project is to strengthen local "governance" by ensuring that civil society participates in decision making and influences local investment. In a short time, a number of sub-projects and over 50 new partners from local authorities are included into the project. As a result of this, the name of the project was changed into the "Turkey Local Agenda 21 Program". The Program had five basic objectives:

The first objective was to increase the number of local authorities engaging in Local Agenda 21, and to promote and develop participatory processes in new partner cities.

The second objective was to prepare local action plans in new partner cities and to implement them in these cities.

The third objective was to launch campaigns to inform the public, as well as to work for increasing international support.

The fourth objective was to ensure long term sustained support for the Local Agenda 21 processes.

The fifth and final objective was to give a facilitating role for Local Agenda 21 in the recovery and reconstruction process of the Marmara earthquake<sup>3</sup>.

#### ***Phase III - Localizing the UN Millennium Development Goals and WSSD<sup>4</sup> Plan of Implementation through the Turkey Local Agenda 21 Governance Network (2004-2006)***

The project carried out during this phase had two main objectives:

The first objective was to institutionalize LA-21 processes and mechanisms at the local and national levels through campaigns and capacity building initiatives. The second objective was to launch a Local Agenda 21 Small Grants Program to promote and substantiate the MDGs and WSSD Plan of Implementation at the local

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.la21turkey.net/> [http://www.la21turkey.net/dl/yg21/IV\\_Asama/JanuaryMarch2009Progress.pdf](http://www.la21turkey.net/dl/yg21/IV_Asama/JanuaryMarch2009Progress.pdf), 13.05.2009.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.la21turkey.net>, 21.04.2009.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.la21turkey.net/index.php?pages=topic&op=cat&cid=118>, 08.05.2009.

<sup>4</sup> WSSD: World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002), <http://www.un.org/events/wssd>, 09.05.2009.

level<sup>1</sup>. In order to attain these objectives, there had been several projects supporting each other. In this connection, by the support of UNDP-TTF Program and through the project entitled “Establishment of Sustainable Networking to Encourage Democratic Local Governance in Turkey”, the available web site renewed to be more interactive and the “Local Agenda 21 Governance Network” was developed (IULA-EMME, 2006: 14).

In addition, by the support of the MATRA Program of the Government of Netherlands, another project entitled “Enhancing the Role of the Women and the Youth in Local Partnerships and Networking for Transparency” was carried out to increase the participation of women and youth to local decision-making procedures as well as to all fields of local governance<sup>2</sup>.

The third project carried out in this phase was entitled “Localizing the UN Millennium Development Goals and WSSD Plan of Implementation through Turkey Local Agenda 21 Governance Network”. The project envisaged to increase the interest and support of central government and to promote better. By this project, “*Supporting the Local Projects Program*” was also started to institutionalize LA-21 processes (Kaya, 2007: 186-187).

#### ***Phase IV - Localizing the UN Millennium Development Goals in Turkey through the Local Agenda 21 Governance Network (2006-2008)***

In this phase, the project entitled “Localizing the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Turkey through the Local Agenda 21 Governance Network” was designed to localize the Government’s MDGs commitments by advocating the prioritization of the UN MDGs in local action. It depended on participatory local governance as the basic means for achieving these goals (UCLG-MEWA, 2009: 21).

The specific targets of the project included to launch a campaign at the national and local levels under the name of “Our City Supports the UN Millennium Development Goals”; to build monitoring capacities for local authorities and City Councils; to develop and internalize local governance practices; to establish the support, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for localizing the MDGs; to promote “best practices” of partnerships between local governance actors and the private sector (UNDP, 2006: 4).

This project is still ongoing.

#### **The City Councils as One of the Basic Components of Local Agenda 21**

The primary decision-making and “enablement” mechanisms for the LA-21 Program are the participatory platforms, namely the City Councils. These councils are supported and complemented by a number of different stakeholders in the city, such as working groups, women and youth councils, and platforms of children, elderly and disabled. Owing to the LA-21 Program, the “City Councils”, along with other participatory mechanisms and processes, are given a legal basis by the Article 76 of the new Law on Municipalities (No. 5393) (UNDP, 2006: 6).

City Councils are the forms of governance mechanisms that meet central government, local government, and civil society under a partnership approach. These councils provide democratic and effective platforms for discussions among the participants whose number depends on the size of the cities about development priorities, urgent problems and possible solutions to them. The basic functions of city councils include identification of priorities and targets as well as basic strategies and areas of action for “sustainable development” and forming a common vision for their cities (Emrealp, 2005: 65). In addition they monitor all activities of local governments and prepare reports to be discussed by the public, thus they fulfill the task of democratic follow-up (Palabıyık ve Görün, 2004: 263). Citizens take part in working groups in accordance with their field of interest on the basis of voluntariness. There is no hierarchical relationship in these groups whose main aim is to work in harmony and efficiently (Kayan, 2005: 31).

## **Conclusion**

Ensuring sustainable development is the common goal of all humanity. To achieve this goal, only the efforts of the central government of course can not be enough. It also requires efforts from local governments, international, supranational, private sector, professional, civil society organizations as well as citizens.

Having a dynamic structure, local governments are successful units within the public administration system.

Their basic characteristic of being the closest administrative unit to citizens provides them with the opportunity to make local services in an efficient and effective way. This characteristic also makes them to be the driving

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.la21turkey.net/index.php?pages=topic&op=cat&cid=117&tid=365>, 10.05.2009.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.la21turkey.net/index.php?pages=topic&op=cat&cid=120&tid=328>, 07.05.2009.

force in local and regional development. Finally it provides local governments with leading roles in promoting the culture of local democracy among the citizens.

Undoubtedly one of the most successful products of LA-21 process is the establishment of city councils as platforms for local participation and democratic debate.

In Turkey, the Law on Municipalities of 2005 makes the establishment these councils obligatory not only in the partner cities to LA-21 Program but also in all districts that have got a municipality. In spite of many shortcomings in legal and practical terms, city councils have become important units in Turkish Local Administrative System. Their importance derives basically from the functions of determining priorities and targets as well as basic strategies and areas of actions for “sustainable development” and forming a common vision for their cities.

Despite these effective functions of the city councils, the number of the partner local governments to LA-21 Program is extremely inadequate (71) as of April 2009.

Moreover, with a few exceptions, Turkish local governments seem uninterested or unwilling to sign the European Urban Charter (1992), Aalborg Charter (1994), Aalborg Commitments (2004) and similar texts. Therefore it is necessary for local governments to give more importance to LA-21 processes like their counterparts in Europe. Similarly, it is also necessary for central government to continue its leading, encouraging, and to some extent forcing, supports.

Considering European Union member states’ attitudes to LA21 processes, this becomes a more urgent need for Turkey’s compliance in this field.

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