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Press release

New Delhi, December 12, 2011

India and Switzerland Sign MOU for Mutual Cooperation on Local Governance

Mr Philippe Welti, Ambassador of Switzerland in India and Ms. Kiran Dhingra, Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of Republic of India signed a MoU for mutual cooperation on local governance on 12th December 2011. The MoU aims at establishing projects to encourage transference of competence between India and Switzerland for strengthening local self-governance, focusing on areas relating to e-governance, local governments performance appraisal, public service delivery through local bodies, solution sharing and mobilization of resources.

Switzerland is recognized across the world for its effective and efficient system of Direct Democracy which can be attributed to several historic, cultural and political factors. The country has had a strong tradition of participation at the local level with citizens playing an active role in politics at the local level through participation in village and cantonal (state-level) assemblies. Clear delimitation of tasks as well as financial autonomy of each tier of the government has helped retain a strong system of decentralized and bottom up development.

India, being a young democracy, local governments are still in a nascent stage in terms of responsibility and authority sharing. Capacity enhancement of local governments through trainings and peer learning has been a priority and is yielding benefits in terms of local governments being more adept in managing local development and advocating on social justice concerns.

In India, the Swiss bilateral cooperation has significantly supported the strengthening of local governments in India from 2001 to 2010. This support was made possible

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through state wide Programmes in Kerala, Sikkim and Rajasthan as well as partnerships with select national level Non-Governmental Organisations. The support has included partnerships with state training institutions for capacity development of elected representatives, training of front line functionaries who work with the Panchayati Raj Institutions, strengthening select training institutions in training curriculum development, faculty improvement and infrastructure provisioning and, policy research and advocacy.

For India, learning from the Swiss experience gains relevance as local governments in India get better capacitated. The MoU will afford an opportunity for Indian stakeholders to learn on systems of inter-governmental fiscal transfers; assignment of functions across different tiers of local governments and methods to promote direct democracy will be studied and assessed for their relevance to India. The MoU will afford an opportunity for the Swiss experts to learn of the grassroots functioning of this large democracy and contribute to a better understanding of the challenges faced and the gains made in strengthening local governments.

The knowledge and experience transference will be made possible through exchanges between elected representatives, civil society organizations, intellectuals, researchers, resource persons and officials from India and Switzerland.

Officials from both the countries were present on the occasion. They include:

- Ms. Rashmi Shukla Sharma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of Republic of India
- Dr Gerolf Weigel, Counsellor and Head of Climate Change and Development, Embassy of Switzerland, New Delhi
- Ms. Preeta Lall, Regional Advisor Decentralisation, Local Governance Initiative, South Asia, Climate Change and Development Division, Embassy of Switzerland, New Delhi
- Mr. Manoj Kumar P, Programme Support Manager, Local Governance Initiative, South Asia, Climate Change and Development Division, Embassy of Switzerland, New Delhi

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