STUDY VISIT GUIDE

THEME: POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Overview

Local politicians and governments play diverse roles in different contexts. This guide offers questions to help foster insightful discussions between Swedish local politicians and their counterparts in ICLD partner countries. By exploring similarities and differences in governance structures, participants can gain a deeper understanding of how political leadership operates in various systems.

Before the study visit

Try to ensure that both partners have basic knowledge about the state of local democracy in both partner countries by studying the relevant ICLD Country Briefs found on our web. The ICLD Country Briefs is a publication series that investigates local democracy around the world. In these reports the authors elaborate on the state of local democracy and ties the information to ICLD's programmes. The reports provide insights into the local contexts, and the possibilities and barriers for successful decentralisation.

Discussion guide for your study visit

The Role of Local Government in Political Leadership

- What are the primary responsibilities and mandate of local politicians and of your local government?
  Follow-up: How do these responsibilities differ between the partners in your partnership?
- How do local governments influence national policies in your context?
  Consider: Are there specific areas where local governments play a leading role, such as education or health?

The Influence of Political Parties

- How influential are political parties in local politics?
  Follow-up: Does party affiliation impact local decision-making, or is there a stronger focus on local issues?
- How are local elections structured in your country?
  Consider: Are there differences in how councillors, mayors, or other officials are elected compared to the national level? Do mayors need to be part of a political party?

- In Sweden the political parties are stronger than individual candidates, and the parties present a list of candidates for mayor.
  Consider: What are the advantages and disadvantages of directly electing mayors, compared to having strong political parties?

Majority and Opposition
- How do you personally work with majority and opposition?
  Follow-up: How do you resolve conflict?
- Do oppositional political parties have influence that is proportional to their electoral popularity when it comes to decision-making at the local level?
  Follow-up: If not, what are the challenges?
- How is political disagreement expressed? (i.e. protests)

Gender Equality and Diversity
- What is the representation of women and minority groups in local political leadership?
  Follow-up: Are there policies or quotas to support gender equality and diversity in local government?
- What challenges do women or minorities face when running for local office?
  Explore: What support systems are in place to encourage broader representation in politics?
- Are persons elected into special seats participating on the same terms?
  Follow-up: Why/Why not?
- Has your local government set goals for balanced political participation or gender parity?
  Follow-up: What is considered equal representation?
- To what degree are women and men equally employed in the labour force, outside of the home?

Resources
- What are the main sources of revenue in your local government?
  Follow-up: What are the main challenges in generating revenue that can be used to serve the population residing in the municipality?
- To what extent are municipal revenues based on the local tax base? What is the median/average tax rate?
  Follow-up: What are the challenges in raising revenue for the municipal budget?
- What are the challenges in terms of limited resources and prioritising?

Privileges
- What privileges do local politicians have in your local government?
  Consider: Material privileges, social privileges, other?
- In your view, to what degree are local politicians likely to use their power to accrue advantages for themselves and their associates?
- Is it common that people pay local politicians to get applications approved or other types of benefits?

The Role of Local Politicians in Community Engagement

- How do local politicians engage with and listen to their communities?
  Follow-up: What methods are used to encourage participation from diverse groups, especially youth and marginalized communities?
- Are there any examples of participatory budgeting or direct citizen involvement in decision-making?
  Consider: What are the advantages and challenges of these approaches?

Political Accountability and Transparency

- How do local politicians ensure accountability to their citizens?
  Explore: Are there specific transparency measures (e.g., public meetings, published reports) that help maintain public trust?
- What mechanisms are in place to handle citizen feedback and complaints?
  Consider: How effective are these mechanisms, and how could they be improved?

Visiting ideas

- ✓ **Observation of Council Meetings or Public Hearings:** Observe a live council meeting or public hearing to witness real-time governance. A follow-up debrief with a council member will provide insights into how coalitions influence voting and discussions.
- ✓ **Roundtable with Council Members and Coalition Leaders:** Arrange a roundtable discussion with council members from different coalitions to explore strategies for collaboration and how coalition dynamics shape local policy decisions.
- ✓ **Take on a learning case together:** ICLD learning cases is an accessible, concrete tool to help local governments base decisions and actions on well-researched conceptual frameworks. Case studies anchor concepts, provide a common setting in which to situate an engaging discussion, and tie learnings to future decisions and actions. You find ICLD Learning Cases here: https://icld.se/en/icld-education-material/

Encourage open dialogue: Foster a safe space for sharing both successes and challenges.
Focus on actionable insights: Identify strategies that can be adapted to your own context.
Document learnings: Capture key takeaways for future reference and potential collaboration.