

GLOBAL ROUNDTABLE ON DECENTRALIZATION & MLG · NEW YORK · FEB 26–27, 2026

Trends and Institutions : MLG in the International Arena

Multilevel Governance as an Enabler of Global Stability

Monika Le Roy

Fellow · Montreal Institute for Global Security

1

I — Context

Geography is Impossible Math

18

Small Island States

The Blue Pacific

25,000

Islands
11 Square miles

Larger than North America

100+

Distinct Languages

Vanuatu alone

Governance is designed at one level. People live at another.

→ *How does the international system itself shape the space in which MLG can — or cannot — function?*

2

Built for a Different Moment

What Was Built

Postwar assumption:

States as primary governance unit

Inter-American Democratic Charter:

Real norms on elections and constitutional order

1990s–2010s momentum:

SDGs · Paris Agreement · New Urban Agenda

What Was Missing

No subnational dimension

When Venezuela, Nicaragua, Haiti backslid — no local toolkit to engage

Consensus constraint:

When member-state interests diverge, institutions cannot move

Grand Bargain 2016:

25% committed to local actors → 0.6% delivered by 2023

"Norms can be established. Compliance cannot be compelled. Political will cannot be manufactured externally."

3

Three Forces Reshaping the Terrain

1

Collapse of Donor Architecture

USAID dismantled

Western ODA contracting

\$14B+ terminated

→ *Forces reckoning on local ownership*

2

Centralization as Political Strategy

Venezuela · Turkey · Haiti

→ *Cases are the argument for MLG*

3

Geopolitical Fragmentation

Competing models bypass conditionality

Reduced investment = reduced cost for engagement

→ *Build case on evidence, not leverage*

The Grand Bargain?

4

Three Principles for the Programming Level

1

Local Agency Not Deficit

Start from what works

2

Political Will Not Substitutable

Invest in domestic constituencies

3

Build Before Fragility Arrives

Haiti: the cost of not building

Sequencing: fiscal · administrative · civil society · accountability — in relation to political economy, not donor cycles

The disruption is real. So is the opportunity. The work is ours to do.

5

The Moment

Global

Geopolitical fragmentation.

Competing models bypass
governance conditionality.

Institutional

Multilateral bodies constrained by
member states.

Norms without enforcement.

Programming

Funding infrastructure withdrawn

This is where agency lives.

Policy level: *Rebuild recognition and trust.*
MLG is foundational for stability and resilience.

Programming level: Local ownership · domestic
constituencies · smaller scale · solutions that work

6