



VISIONING REPORT UN75
**THE ROLE OF LOCAL AND
REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS
IN THE FUTURE GLOBAL
GOVERNANCE OF THE
INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM**



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Introduction: Making the Case

- In a context of unprecedented, interconnected, and universal challenges, local and territorial issues are no longer solved only at these levels, and the global transformation required to respond to the needs of communities is not possible without local and territorial ownership. The pandemic that we are facing has galvanized the critical role of local and regional governments in raising public awareness and maintaining basic public services, as well as responding rapidly to fast-changing realities and emergencies all while ensuring the safety and protection of local public officials who deliver services that assist people and residents, especially the most vulnerable ones.
- The international municipal and regional movement has started to facilitate a local-regional-global platform to ensure that the voices represented are our own, and that through governance of proximity, we will contribute to the planning of our communities taking into account their own perspectives.
- This step is pivotal in bringing about the future that local and regional leaders imagine, to ensure the way we face the global trends that will shape the world in the next 25 years will be through a more equal and peaceful world. A multilateral system in dialogue with civil society. One that puts people's needs and rights and the deeply shared connection with the planet that we depend on for our lives and livelihoods at the center of our cities and other local and regional territories.
- The current pandemic has shown us how our world can change in only a few months and underlines how difficult it is for society to imagine a world 5 months from now, let alone in 25 years. This forward-looking vision will need to be one that is shaped and grounded on the views of all stakeholders and all levels of government. Only together can we truly imagine and achieve the world we want to inhabit in 2045. Multilateralism is about our communities.
- Our movement is convinced that the rapid and systemic transformation that is required in the multilateral model will only be possible if it responds to the dreams and expectations of citizens if local and regional communities feel and experience that they have a say in their future, and only if all stakeholders take collective responsibility to make this happen. Local and regional governments are closest to our communities, fulfill a central role in their lives, and will continue to fulfill a central role in their future. We can help trigger this conversation on the future amongst citizens by championing our role as sentinels of dreams and aspirations and as the institutions that hold our communities' trust.



- This is why we are answering to the call of the UN Secretary General, in these times in which our communities need us the most, to ensure that the visions of local and regional leaders and the communities they serve shape the global system, to bring about a next generation of multilateralism that integrates local democracy at the core of peaceful societies, so that it may foster equality and stay true to the principles of decentralization, subsidiarity, accountability and sustainable development. The world that we imagine by 2045 is one that responds to the needs, to the dreams, and to the aspirations of our communities – and one that develops in harmony with nature.
- The international system currently in place is, at its heart, the system that was built post-wars. Its progress has allowed many nations to flourish, and throughout this time we have witnessed unprecedented growth in many of our communities. The current events, however, are placing a magnifying glass on its shortcomings and are highlighting just how important it is to provide a renewal of this system, to focus on the aspects that can provide a better future for our citizens, and to improve upon what does not work.
- COVID-19 is the first pandemic of this scale and the biggest challenge that the United Nations is facing since its establishment in 1945. Following the first wave of change in the early 1990s through globalization, with its opportunities and challenges, the second in 2015/2016 in terms of deals for sustainable development. The post COVID-19 pandemic recovery processes will be third and most important moment to determine whether the UN will be able to unite the people one again in harmony with the places and the planet they live on. Our choices will define whether cities and nations will be able to minimize social and economic damages and, at the same time, leapfrog into the age of a transformative sustainability for human societies and the planetary ecosystems that have been striving to nourish over the past couple of decades.
- We call for a more comprehensive system, one that acknowledges the realities of an urbanized and decentralized world, that puts service provision at the forefront and that takes care of those who take care of us. This can only be done by recognizing cities, territories and local communities as central players in decision-making.
- The question we are tackling here is the kind of system with the capacity to bring about the transformation that our communities are calling for. How do we shape this model of governance that will allow us to achieve the goals that we set for ourselves five years ago?
- We imagine a future in which the seat at the global table for our constituency is guaranteed, securing and enabling an impactful and permanent link between our communities and the world's global institutions. We imagine a shift from an internationally dominated system to one that has cities and territories at the core, reflecting the new era of bottom-up and locally appropriate approaches and responses to global challenges.
- We imagine a future in which the sacrifices that are made now are in favour of the communities of the future and, in fact, it is only through inclusive co-creation with our communities and local actors, and through full collaboration between all levels of government that we will be able to achieve this future.
- City and region diplomacy, driven by cooperation, is the sign of transformation to a system in which cities and territories are prominent actors in the promotion of peace and solidarity. We envision the future of the international system as the flagbearer of both territorial and state diplomacies, as one that has adopted local democracy, nourished by a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, that counts on cultural diversity, and the development of peaceful, just and sustainable societies.
- 2045, practically the middle of this century, is an important benchmark – by this time we must reach the 1,5^o mark for a green, resilient, world which protects biodiversity and is inclusive leaving no one and no place behind.

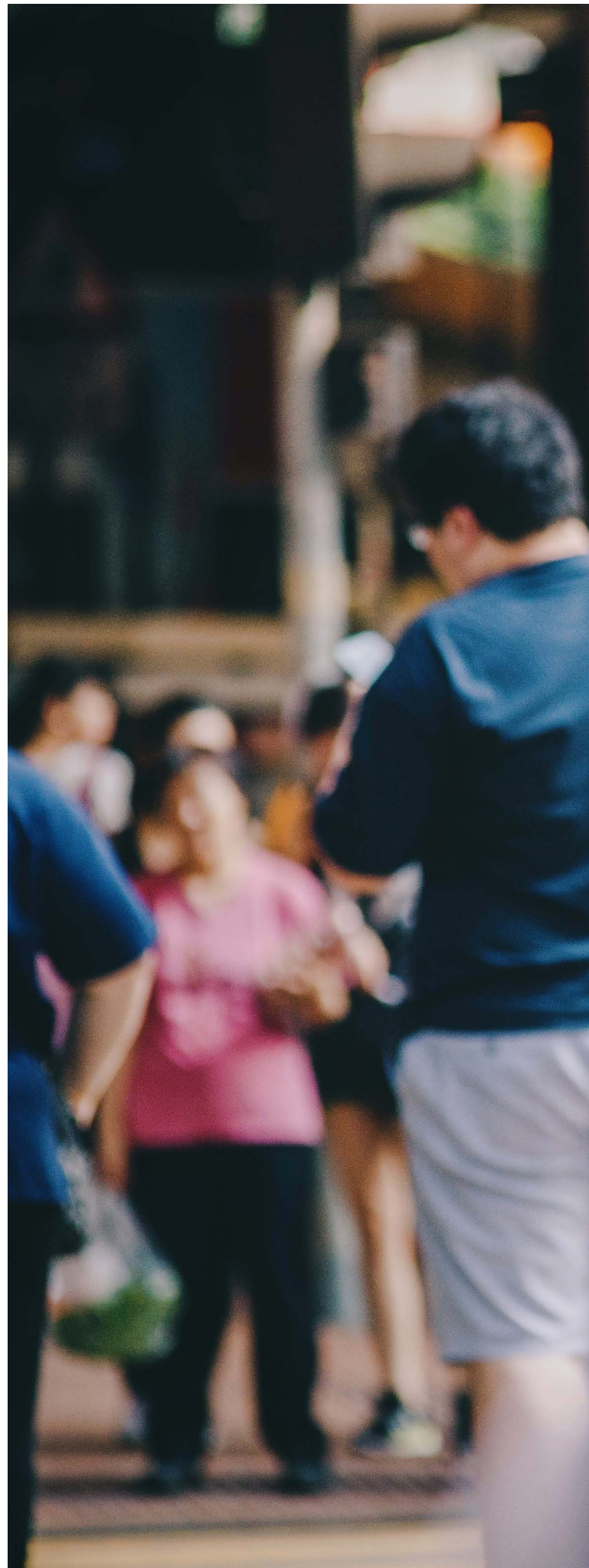
2020: Our Present

In the interdependent world we live in now, the critical question is how to better manage the risks inherent in our global society. Our challenges are interconnected which means that our solutions must be, too. To reach true multilateral collaboration we need to move forward with the structural changes in the multilateral system in order to overcome the following trends that characterize our world today.



- While decentralization has increased in many parts of the world since the adoption of the international system, it is also true that **trends of recentralization, or decentralization without effective means have increased over the recent years**. Local democratic self-governance has also been adversely affected due to the COVID-19 outbreak, as has the capacity of our communities to own the global goals and truly contribute to the SDGs. The Universal Development Agendas, chief among them the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda, and the Paris Agreement, represent a **new social contract that needs to be fulfilled**, and the urgency to do so becomes greater when faced with challenges that threaten the very existence of our society, and its natural support systems on which all life on earth depend.
- The current outbreak has amplified how our current development model, in spite of the transformative efforts of the global development agendas, is **stress testing our systems**, from health and natural systems to economic and education, from essential basic services and housing supply to infrastructure and resilience systems, all while blurring the dichotomy between urban and rural areas. The pandemic is also making us question what work will look like in the coming decades and what needs to be done to protect workers from increasing waves of unemployment.
- The health, nature and climate emergencies, the civil demands and rights of communities that remain unfulfilled, coupled with an increase of authoritarian measures –as a reaction to civic movements and the peaceful use of their right to assembly, protest, and freedom of speech– is putting human rights across the globe to the test. The expansion of uncontrolled urban sprawl, the precariousness that billions of people experience (such as “invisible” populations who live and work in informal environments), on top of protracted crises and armed conflicts that disrupt lives, destroy communities, generate human displacement, fuel migrations, and increase violence calls for a new modern conception of human rights that can evolve and be obtained for all in the coming decades.
- If we are to transform the world according to the dreams of our communities the current model of governance needs to have shifted radically by 2045. The current **international system** is that of incomplete international cooperation as it does not fully consider all stakeholders as equally necessary for transformation. There is a **top down** approach towards governance that ultimately deems local and regional governments, and other stakeholders that defend, protect, and legitimize the multilateral system, as secondary actors.
- **Inequalities** between and within countries and communities are still at the origin of the vast majority of problems worldwide. They contribute to the rise of discrimination and radicalization in our societies, and have only been exacerbated in the span of the last 10 years. The current system, which has for a long time worked to improve the lives of all citizens needs to be transformed, with the primary focus of building more equal, open and accessible regions and cities.
- Social fragmentation and rising nationalism are exacerbated by **extreme inequalities**, those of which have been made even more apparent during this outbreak. Not only between countries, but also between cities and territories and within them. Almost more than one in four urban dwellers live in slums or marginalized neighborhoods. Unbalanced territorial development and commodification of public goods aggravate spatial and social polarization and put governance and democracy under pressure, fueling disaffection and distrust in institutions. A collective effort to reduce inequalities will be critical for the communities of the future. An international system that aims at reducing nationalism and preventing wars should be a priority for the world of the future.

- While it is true that urbanization and globalization processes have proven to be essential to providing opportunities for citizens, it is also true that they have also aggravated inequalities, as acknowledged in the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda. Inequalities become a persistent and growing phenomenon that can be considered as cause, catalyst and symptom of **rights violations** at both the physical and digital level, and further, a threat to social cohesion. This trend has negative impacts on local communities, especially on more vulnerable groups, revealing unprecedented challenges in the territories that led in the past years to a joint and global call from international and local stakeholders to “leave no one and no place behind”.
- Inequalities are more than ever embedded in territorial realities, their spatial dimension, social-spatial segregation, metropolization processes or territorial discrimination phenomenon as well as inequalities between territories (urban and rural, central and peripheral, wealthy and poor, attractive and economy depressed territories).
- Moreover **technologic advances are not equally shared by all, causing a digital divide** that is having a profound effect on inequality and citizens’ daily lives as internet access is unequal and ethical standards of technology are not followed. Tools such as artificial intelligence need to be developed in a way that is of use to all citizens, and not to the discretion of those with more resources.





➤ **Demands coming from civil society** and the organizations that are drivers of change have often been overlooked for years, leading to more social conflicts, and further highlighting the social dimension of inequalities. Multilateralism, as this crisis has reminded us, calls for working more effectively between all stakeholders, putting an end to siloed actions of various actors. This is especially concerning as there is a commitment in the 2030 Agenda for civil society to be taken into account in order to solve global matters. Civil society and their organizations have to be protected, and their opinions actively considered in order to protect local and regional communities.

➤ Increasing **hate speech and crimes, xenophobia, radicalization processes and social exclusion mechanisms of marginalized/invisibilized people** have fragmented our societies, revealing the importance that the discrimination of vulnerable and invisible groups plays as a structural driver leading to inequality. Finally, megatrends such as climate change, financialization of housing markets, and the digital economy are also shaping new faces and manifestations of inequalities – having a strong impact in many communities.

➤ While well-managed cities and regions are increasingly recognized as key and vital levers to confront many of the global challenges, these empowered local and regional governments need to be acknowledged as those best equipped to respond to the social crisis that will take place once the worst effects of the pandemic are over. It will be up to cities, and local and regional governments to guide global actions in the aftermath, by learning and supporting each other as an interconnected worldwide system in order to lead the discussion with communities on how our future, and the way we live, will be shaped.

2045: Joint Vision

It is necessary that the current lack of legitimacy related to actions being carried out by various actors, in light of the global agendas, be surmounted by 2045. Our vision of 2045 is about a more profound and restorative relationship between humanity and planning, between wellbeing and wellness of individual human beings at the community level as well as global harmony between all life forms on the planet. Within this context, local and regional governments will continue to bring legitimacy to the global agendas, and will continue strengthening them from the ground-up as the closest level of government to the people and territories.



- In 2045, we express our wish for an interurban world, one that puts **local democracy** at the core. A world built on the force of cities and regions that hold **solidarity and capacity** as a beacon of security and as the backbone of humanity. Our wish is for a world that places equality, intergenerational dialogues and a transition from a productive to a creative and sustainable society at heart. A world that protects existing rights and fully explores new ones based on new realities. A world that ensures strong independent voices of local and regional leaders as a guarantee of the aspirations of communities – which are centrally positioned, heard, and respected at the global table.
- The framework of the Sustainable Development Goals remains a valid reference to frame the transformational measures that our world will need in order to carry out co-creation with our communities, and all actors, so as to reach the year 2045 having achieved these goals, in a world where people and the planet thrive in harmony.
- In 2045, a **decentralized** world and multilateral system with true local-regional-national dialogue and strong community participation in the international policy making system will reinforce the push towards the achievement of future social contracts. It is an urgent collective journey to be embarked on without further delay, we must depart towards this common destination with the resolve these grand challenges call for.
- In 2045, we imagine a world where the local and territorial are the first, central and pinnacle of bottom-up development, where local and regional governments, communities and actors are included from the outset, inception, formulation, design and implementation phases of the development of policy and our societies. Empowered local and regional authorities and communities will take full ownership of the localization processes.
- It is only through full involvement of local and regional governments in the localization process that we will fully deliver on the global agendas, reinforcing the essential connection between **science and local and regional governments** as strong advocates for evidence-based actions.
- We imagine a world with an integrated governance and participatory planning approach to design cities and territories, as reflected in the New Urban Agenda, the SDGs, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and other global agendas such as the new Global Biodiversity Framework –envisioned to be adopted at the CBD COP15 in 2021. This new approach is necessary to strengthen human rights, inclusiveness, gender equality, environmental protection and restoration, with a particular emphasis on climate adaptation and mitigation, the green recovery, biodiversity, disaster risk prevention, and will multiply the benefits of **interlinkages between urban and rural areas**.
- In 2045, a new relationship between our society, nature and the environment will become the reality, built on the principles of solidarity between all urban settlements and territories as the living spaces of human values and actions: the true **ecological transition**. A world centered on the basis of the principles of **social justice, equity, fundamental rights, democracy and sustainability** where all inhabitants (present and future) will be able to use, occupy, produce, govern and enjoy just, inclusive, safe and sustainable cities, villages, settlements, and territories, in harmony with nature. Regions and cities are better suited to fight inequalities among territories in order to achieve an equal and fair society, in which all citizens' rights are respected and protected.
- In 2045 all human settlements are **net zero emissions**, offer a decent standard of living and are affordable to all, including the most vulnerable. Ambitious climate action in cities and regions have transformed cities and regions for the better, addressing urgent political priorities for national, and local gover-



nments, for example by improving air quality, cutting traffic congestion, reducing road injuries and ensuring key services are accessible to all. Zero-carbon, climate-resilient cities and human settlements will become more attractive places to live and work, offering a national competitive advantage in the global race for talent and investment. Thanks to circular economy principles, waste (including construction, food, and non-recyclables) is virtually non-existent. Water operates in a closed loop without any loss from recovery, distribution, to consumption. Buildings are fully adapted to local conditions, are accessible, and are designed on nature-based solutions and vernacular architecture principles. Electricity is 100% renewable and accessible to all. Transport is zero-carbon and entirely public. Cycling and walking is prioritized everywhere. Cities are highly efficient innovation hubs, integrating nature-based solutions and fostering integration and dialogue among all citizens. Health and well-being are prioritized, and all policy and investment decisions are considered under a climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience lens.

- The Right to the City and the **rights based approach** will establish the path to equality, putting human rights back at local and regional levels through shared principles: a culture of peace to respond to urban violence; citizen's participation to co-create both cities

and regions with access to public space and quality of life for all; and environmental justice with a "green deal" that ensures that future economic growth is not at the detriment of our environment.

- Extreme poverty will be history and local and regional governments will be empowered to develop prosperity and effective social inclusive policies to ensure the wellbeing of all, **including the more vulnerable groups, eradicating discriminatory policies** based on gender, age, religion, ethnic heritage, disability, sexual orientation, and tackling false narratives that often frame invisible populations as the cause of crises.
- **Gender equality** will be the norm. Women and men will have equal representation in political decision-making roles, benefit from equal rights and treatments. All people will be empowered to exercise their rights to the fullest extent possible through the local fostering of safer and fairer environments and guaranteed access to appropriate support mechanisms.
- In 2045, **culture** will have been recognized by the international community as the fourth dimension of sustainable development, on equal basis to the economic, social and environmental pillars. In order to achieve this recognition, it would be crucial that the post-2030 Development Agenda includes a stand-alone Goal on Culture. One that includes several targets related to memory, heritage, creativity, diversity and knowledge, supported by a narrative that clearly identifies culture as a core component of local and regional identity, a strand of global solidarity, and a vector for peace and human rights. Moreover, cultural and language rights will become the norm in national, regional and local policies, explicitly addressing the challenge of inequalities, in particular through cultural programmes aiming at education, active participation, critical citizenship, gender equality, linguistic diversity, and the empowerment of indigenous peoples. The recognition of culture and linguistic diversity in sustainable development is not only an image or a metaphor but also a matter of power: a framework to understand our world, promoting freedom and making for stronger and more creative communities.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has further showcased just how essential basic public services are to face the worst disasters, as well as social and economic crises. **Local universal public service provision** is, now more than ever, imperative to guarantee that citizens have equal access to essential resources and services, access to decent employment, capacity-building activities, and the promotion of innovation by the development of technological vocations. It will be equally critical to **take care of public service providers**: those that carry out basic service protection, and value their contributions to society.
- Local and regional governments will also be key actors of local prosperity, and will need particular support in the aftermath to promote bold initiatives to **invigorate local and regional economies**, support start-ups, small and medium sized enterprises and propel the sharing and social economy, integrating the informal sector within the urban fabric, to ensure that all citizens have equal access to opportunities and a decent standard of living.
- **By 2045, a transition to new consumption and production patterns** will have been achieved, contributing to a healthy urban metabolism, and equitable and sustainable “net zero” circular cities. Reduced GHG emissions, zero-carbon territories, a renewable energy transition, the **circular economy**, and a territorial approach to **food systems** that respects the environment and restores life and biodiversity to our territories will be in place. Waste generation will be brought to an absolute minimum and reducing and reusing materials will become the norm.
- Work, by 2045, will need to have bridged the divide between the formal and the informal sphere, acknowledging the value of labour wherever it comes from. It needs to have tackled the technological divide and automation and offer safe, decent conditions to all.
- Shorter economic circuits will strengthen the collaboration between cities and their hinterland, e.g. fostering local/regional food systems. Local and regional governments will be at the center and fully equipped in the management of these patterns through integrated urban and territorial planning, resilient infrastructure and accessible public service provision.
- Cities, regions, and their communities will be at the forefront of the **sharing of technology** of the future to ensure the effective and efficient development of territories and people. The current pandemic has shown how unequal access to technology has a negative effect for social equality and welfare. Innovation will be encouraged and smart cities and regions initiatives will be based on solidarity and the respect of the ecological transition, while guaranteeing the protection of digital rights and the negative effects resulting from the use of artificial intelligence. The digital divide will have been reduced, the digital transition will have been carried out with the most vulnerable populations in mind, transparency will be present, and data privacy will be the norm. Smart solutions and artificial intelligence will cater to the rapid urbanizing of developing areas, contributing to resilience via **social and disaster risk reduction**. In short, technology will first and foremost help people and their communities, eliminating the false dichotomy between security, and privacy, and at the service of democratic societies.
- Overall, inclusive global governance will lead to a 2045 driven by solidarity and peace in preservation of our planet. For this, we will need to bring about changes in the way we co-create the territory, by **empowering the community** and to harness the power of co-creation of our cities and territories. We will transition from an **inter-national to a networked multilateral system** based on collaborative relations between cities and territories, as well as national and regional institutions. Local and Regional Governments will become the levers to catalyze these transformations.
- The future of the international system in 2045 will be built on systems of cities, regions and communities **based on solidarity and not competition**, and thus allow the transition from a productive to a creative society. The transformation that our planet calls for needs to be driven by solidarity, and will be owned by our communities and protected by their local and regional governments.

The Structural Shift: towards a Community Driven Multilateralism

Our unique position as the constituency of local and regional governments is one that harnesses inclusion and co-creation, one that embraces the structural shift needed to move us towards “community-driven multilateralism”. We are a constituency that puts citizens at the heart of governance, hence demonstrating that what we bring to the global table is **inclusion and trust; two essential elements of leaving no one and no place behind.**



- The structural shift requires **co-creation and partnership** mechanisms that allow the allocation of competences, responsibilities and resources of the different spheres of government and different parts of society (including civil society organizations, academia, donors and other stakeholders), both vertically and horizontally in accordance with the principle of **collaborative governance** and **subsidiarity** through effective decentralization. The result is the implementation of a shared leadership. An prime example is the United Nations Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA), the framework of which could be replicated within all UN Bodies, or even the creation of a UN Body solely dedicated to local and regional Governments.
- A shift in the approach will also be needed in order to integrate urban areas into the **wider territory** they belong to, explicitly acknowledging the fundamental importance of understanding and promoting balanced sustainable development across the whole urban-rural continuum. Combating the rural exodus will be, in this sense, a priority for all levels of government to avoid, the “empty territory” scenario that is occurring in many countries around the world.
- Within this context, **territorial cohesion** must be at the forefront of international policy making. This future system should be characterized by an international, local, and regional movement founded upon tighter links between a balanced system of cities and the strengthening of the urban-rural continuum. One that is built on the experiences and policies developed by all types of local and regional governments, with particular care for small towns and intermediary cities.

➤ In an ideal multilateral and sustainable world, stronger collaboration and **dialogue across generations** will be vital to explore alternatives for delivering sustainable development in 2045. Putting people at the core, will imply the **protection of the commons and basic needs** as well as **access to public** services for all, defending them from speculation and ensuring equal access to them within renewed multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms. As the COVID-19 pandemic has stressed, strong social protection and health systems that are accessible to all are the only way we can truly make ourselves resilient. Moving away from political and financial concentration of resources towards unlocking access to diverse sources of financing, and innovative financial instruments for local and regional governments and their communities will be critical in that respect. Overall, fighting structural inequalities and ensuring that all facets of the population are listened to, including the most vulnerable, will be key to this renewed governance system.

➤ A new generation of legal and policy frameworks based on human rights and the right to the city should be developed, supported by capacity building, peer to peer learning and political debates to move towards an urban-territorial solidarity model. This will be possible through a system that recognizes the key role that local and regional governments play in mitigating crises and ensuring all citizens’ health and rights are protected. The COVID-19 pandemic has made absolutely clear that decentralized cooperation and solidarity between local and regional governments is both key to our response as well as in the aftermath of the crisis.

- The structural shift will acknowledge local and regional governments as **public institutions in their own right** and will be recognized as such within international policy making and with regard to access to public resources and in the organization of public expenditure.

- This involves a democratically debated and validated organization of the respective mandates and resources of the different spheres of government as well as shared responsibilities between the different levels. It will require the creation of an enabling institutional environment and the establishment of a system of checks and balances to monitor and ensure the effectiveness and impact of the sharing of powers, competencies and resources to produce public goods and services.
- In this endeavor, local and regional governments will have **equitable access to public resources to deliver on their mandate**, through the consolidation of their fiscal autonomy and stable and predictable intergovernmental fiscal transfers. They will also have direct access to financial markets to finance capital investments and facilities of public interest in their territories. Finally, they will have the opportunity to represent themselves at the global level.
- The structural shift requires a better articulated international architecture based on a **networked and inclusive multilateral system linking regions, cities and territories**. The territorially integrated multilateral system will promote **bottom-up** development and will tackle issues related to siloes and reach those ‘furthest behind’ first. An international system that ensures all voices are truly heard. It is essential, in this sense, that central governments engage in this decentralized vision, ceding powers and providing the necessary support for local and regional governments to act efficiently, including a global mechanism within the UN system to foster multilevel and collaborative governance. Our role in this sense needs to be anchored with national governments.
- This structural shift will require that local and regional governments, through their ecosystem of networks, have **a full-fledged**

permanent Seat at the Decision-Making Table. Building on the acknowledgement of the World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments, and the representativeness of the Global Taskforce, local and regional governments will have a Seat at the Table that will enable to co-decide through all stages of the decision-making: from definition, to formulation, to design and implementation.

- **This system will be one based on interdependence** as our solutions are interrelated and our challenges are interconnected. We can only move forward as one and the multilateral governance system must reflect this through true dialogue amongst all levels of government and amongst all stakeholders.
- **Multilevel governance is not just beneficial but necessary** to ensure that all communities are heard and that no one and no place is left behind. The future of multilateralism should be one in which multilateral organizations look directly at local and regional governments for appropriate guidance on what they do best: localizing the SDGs and adapting them to the realities of the world, which are local wherever one may be on the globe.

The time for action is now. The moment to establish a governance model based on making decisions following patterns of collaboration and not competition. More than ever, as the pandemic has shown, local and regional governments are key to achieving a paradigm of sustainable development: “think globally, act locally”. This is the moment to establish a governance model that enables decision making based on multi-level collaboration. The most genuine example is the 2030 Agenda. After all, the greatest global challenges defined in the SDGs must be implemented at territorial and local level where citizens can be part of it.

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