

Statement of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments

High Level Meeting on UN-Habitat and Habitat III

5-6 September 2017

Mainstreaming urbanization across the UN

Recent years have seen increasing recognition among the international community of the significance of global urbanization to sustainable development, particularly since 2008, the year in which over half the world's population lived in urban areas for the first time.

The discourse on urbanization is shifting too; though many still speak of urbanization as a challenge, there are an increasing number of voices highlighting the potential of densely packed urban settlements to create jobs and sustainable production and consumption patterns, reduce carbon emissions, increase social inclusion and promote culture, peace and good governance. Urbanization is being understood as an opportunity to be embraced and not a problem to fix.

There is also a growing awareness of the need to question the artificial urban-rural divide and to understand urban areas as deeply interdependent with their surrounding territories. The content of both the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11 on sustainable cities and human settlements reflect this growing consensus.

However, within the UN System, urbanization is still too often seen as a single-issue concern that is the sole responsibility of UN-Habitat, rather than as the transversal dimension of development that it is. If the transformative potential of the issue is to be harnessed, **urbanization must be mainstreamed across the work of all UN agencies and bodies.**

In many cases, this will require a fundamental shift in priorities and ways of working. It will mean considering the differential impact of all development policies and financing on urban and rural areas, developing improved sub-national data sources and indicators, and working through and promoting multi-level governance systems in Member States, as well as collaborating with international networks of local and regional governments to promote peer-to-peer learning.

- ***In this light we welcome the narrative of the Panel's report and the proposal to set up UN-URBAN with the aim of putting urbanization and the territorial approach to development in the heart of the UN.***
- ***We further welcome the plea by the Panel to strengthen UN-Habitat and the acknowledgement of its role in creating an enabling environment for urbanization and local development. We welcome the proposal of universal membership of an Urban Assembly to provide policy guidance to a renewed UN-Habitat.***

A seat at the global table

Local and regional governments have proved our political will and capacity to organize and contribute to global policy debates over recent years. Our constituency had significant presence and impact in the Post-2015 process, co-leading the successful campaign for an Urban SDG and highlighting the need to localize all goals and targets.

Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, we are now contributing sub-national reports to the SDG monitoring process. The **World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments** was widely recognized as one of the highlights of Habitat III and many of our recommendations were included in the New Urban Agenda. On climate change, mayors have led global action through initiatives such as the Local Government Climate Roadmap, the Carbonn climate registry and the Compact of Mayors, among many others.

The establishment of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments in 2012 marked a turning point for our constituency, making subnational governments the only non-state stakeholder with a single mechanism to contribute to all major UN policy-making and consultation processes.

But, in order for global policies and agreements to properly harness local experience and commitment, the place of local and regional governments in international policymaking needs to change. Discussions on the universality of the New Urban Agenda and the institutional response of the UN system should aim to develop a vision to engage all levels of governments in all countries for implementation and their constituency as active partners for consultation in the global governance in order to seize the full potential for transformation and face the challenges of the evolving urban world. The current global consensus on development is an outstanding opportunity to empower sub-national governments to implement their plans and policies, while also improving their dialogue and collaboration with national and international institutions.

The governmental character of local and subnational governments needs to be acknowledged at the UN in order to allow for our constituency to play its full role in contributing to the global agendas.

Furthermore, we call for the efforts of local and regional governments to organize and produce informed inputs to global processes to be acknowledged. We must be included in structured consultation as a recognized and organized constituency, rather than subject to ad hoc consultation processes.

- ***In this regard, we welcome the Panel's recommendation for a specific consultation mechanism for local and regional governments to be set up in the governance structure of UN Habitat and UN Urban. However, we feel the proposals are not ambitious enough, nor do they reflect existing experiences and lessons learned from mechanisms such as UNACLA.***

- ***We invite the UN Secretary General to include a dedicated section for stakeholder engagement in the next report of the UN Reform Agenda to be released in December 2017, with a specific focus on the vision to engage governments at all levels and their constituencies in the work of UN at the national, supra-national, regional/continental/subcontinental and global levels and processes, as well as creating appropriate linkages and synergies with the Local2030 Process.***
- ***We call for the World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments, as acknowledged in the Quito Outcome document, to be taken into account in the follow up and review of the Habitat III implementation.***
- ***Likewise, we call for the organized constituencies of civil society and major groups, specifically GAP, to be taken into account in this same process.***

Revitalizing global partnerships

Local and regional governments are committed to playing our role in a new global partnership for sustainable development, as expressed in SDG 17.

As the level of government closest to the people, we often play a role of convenor and facilitator of partnerships between civil society, the private sector and national governments, among others, in our communities. We also do this at global level. Our international networks are forging ever closer partnerships with civil society organizations and Major Groups, particularly those which share our priorities in terms of gender equality, sustainable urbanization, informal settlements and workers, culture as a pillar of development, and citizen participation and democratic governance. Local government networks also have strong partnerships with numerous UN Agencies and multilateral organizations.

It is therefore vital that subnational governments are empowered by our national counterparts and international institutions to play our part in a revitalized global partnership for development. Our unique status as the level of government closest to people must be recognized and supported so that we can involve communities in the SDGs and target resources to the most vulnerable so that no-one is left behind. The UN should work from the assumption that the successful implementation of the SDGs at the national level always stems from empowered and capable local and regional governments, as a way to promote a territorial approach to development.

Local and regional governments require effective multi-level governance and decentralization according to the principle of subsidiarity, improved local financing and access to ODA and development loans, and increased support for peer-to-peer learning. With these tools, and by working with our government and civil society partners at every level, we can achieve the global goals from the bottom up.

- ***In this light, we welcome the Panel's recommendation to strengthen the WUF and develop it as permanent multi-stakeholder platform for***

the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, with direct inputs to the decision making mechanisms of UN Habitat

- ***We further commit to continue working with Major Groups, civil society and stakeholders in particular through the General Assembly of Partners to develop concrete collaboration proposals***

Looking forward

We encourage UN Member States to consider the recommendations of the High Level Panel and deliberations during the High Level meeting as constructive inputs for the third and most important decision-making phase of their work in the follow-up and review of the New Urban Agenda.

- ***We invite the 2nd Committee of the UN General Assembly to develop a clear, transparent, inclusive, innovative and ambitious roadmap to complete the third phase of the follow-up and review process as defined in para.173 of the New Urban Agenda.***
- ***We invite all relevant partners to consider launching a global campaign to mobilize an active and broad stakeholder engagement to ensure an innovative and ambitious outcome by the end of the third phase to be concluded in September 2018.***