
Joint Statement to the 2021 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

of the organized constituency of local and regional governments

#HLPF2021
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Joint Statement

In a world facing an unprecedented crisis, local and regional governments and their representative associations have been and still are at the forefront of efforts to overcome these difficult times and ensure that people and the planet are duly protected.

The crises stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic have shown the intrinsic link between local public service provision and health systems and the importance that these services play in protecting people, the planet, and fostering prosperity and care for all. **Local and regional sustainable policy-making has been critical to preserve our communities' safety, linking health systems, public services and the universal development agendas.**

As the conversation gears towards the recovery, we shall address the failures and gaps that have been observed during the pandemic in order to prepare our communities to be more resilient to face possible recurrent crises of similar nature. Recovery packages must consider how to address the economic and social dimension of recovery, without compromising the future of our societies and planet, reducing the harmful environmental impact of our cities and territories.

The recovery needs to be equitable and work for all communities

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the inequalities and shortcomings that we were already aware of. Structurally discriminated social groups and territories are among the most heavily affected by the health, economic and social consequences of this pandemic, which brings with it a host of complex and intertwined crises.

Throughout the worst of the pandemic, it has often been LRGs, supported by their associations and their peers across the world, who worked tirelessly at the frontline to safeguard the rights and health of communities via local public service delivery, underpinning health measures.

As we enter the recovery, it is essential to adequately resource and support public services and, in particular, to ensure universal health care around the world. Moreover, we need to honour the commitment of making vaccines a global public good through strong collaboration between the public and private sectors and equitably distributed to people in all countries and territories. We need to restore and improve the education systems, to avoid leaving the millions of children that dropped out from classes and are at risk of falling below minimum reading proficiency levels. Localized food systems are also critical to contribute to equity, by ensuring nutrition and food security.

The need to bridge the digital divide is more crucial than ever, as we enter an era where digital knowledge for work, education, health, and even public procedures is becoming more common. Digital literacy is therefore a new human right. It is necessary to carry out an equality framework to ensure full inclusion and participation of all, protecting digital rights and creating public infrastructures to facilitate access to internet in public spaces and to guarantee adequate support as a new public service.

Essential services will need to be redefined as we work towards a society where solidarity and active and informed citizenship guarantee safety for all. All people need to be involved when defining the future, mindful of the crucial role of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development and of the need to develop inclusive public spaces.

Involving vulnerable groups in governance is critical, in particular older persons and persons with disability, in order to design territories that work for all people. Equal representation of women, in decision-making and in all facets of society, needs special focus. In the current context safeguarding and accelerating gender equality is essential to meet the SDGs.

People-centered governance is the key for developing a sustainable urban recovery and infrastructures that promote a more inclusive urban development, integrating informal settlements and activities in the urban fabric in the Global South, and reducing harmful urban environmental impacts.

It will be critical to cooperate towards the implementation of the Global Compacts for Migration and Refugees as critical roadmaps to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Recognising the positive contributions of migrant and displaced populations to their communities of origin, transit and destination is a prerequisite to ensure the recovery is inclusive, fair and equitable, regardless of migration status.

The role of LRGs as a lever for transformation is nowhere as clear as it is in the COVID-19 recovery. At the same time, all of these measures can only occur if LRGs are included in decision-making processes at all levels.



The only recovery is a recovery which is safe, green and just

Stimulus packages for the recovery need to promote sustainable economy, infrastructures and public services that create opportunities for all, that reduce the environmental impact of cities and territories, that are low carbon and that support the transition toward renewable energies.

As major engines for economic growth, cities and territories are well placed to drive place-based policies adapted to their communities to unlock economic, social and environmental benefits. LRGs are also drivers of ecological action, by ensuring the renewal of infrastructure towards zero-carbon by 2050. It is essential that commitments to ecological transformation to preserve our planet are at the core of decision-making and political agendas at all levels. In order to enable essential local action on climate change, we must ensure global green finance is more accessible to cities and local governments.

It is key to create new models and framework of commitments to guarantee productive employment and decent work for all in order to address the rising inequalities that the pandemic has exacerbated. Work, and guaranteeing workers' rights, is the most powerful lever to address inequalities and the gender and racial gap. A green and just recovery could create as many as 50 million sustainable jobs by the end of 2025, over a third more than a traditional, high-carbon recovery. This calls for the redefinition of critical sectors, such as tourism, by communities and LRGs as a critical pillar of the promotion of cultural diversity, fraternity and heritage while ensuring decent jobs and fostering innovation and sustainability with cross generation responsibilities.

Ahead of the UNFCCC COP26, joining the Race to Zero and Race to Resilience global campaigns becomes a necessity, promoting and supporting cities and regions pledge to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, a just transition to prevent escalating threats, address inequalities by creating decent jobs and unlocking inclusive and sustainable pathways.

This should include providing equal access to quality education for all, employment opportunities for youth and people with disabilities, professional and vocational training and upskilling on soft and digital skills, and tackling the administrative, economic and technological barriers that impact our communities, including regularisation mechanisms, benefits and protection for informal workers and contract-based workers.

We pledge for an equality-driven system that fully engages LRGs and their associations, able to deliver universal basic services and healthcare, decent jobs and opportunities for all, powered by a green and sustainable vision, using the most appropriated technologies available, to contribute to reinforce the urban-rural continuum enriched through peer-to-peer cooperation and driven by accountable inclusive institutions at all levels.



Strengthening multi-level governance and capacities for LRGs is a must

The constituency of LRGs is convinced that the 2030 Agenda is an adequate framework not only for the transformation required for the COVID-19 aftermath, but also to ensure an equitable, inclusive and sustainable recovery. We are also aware that no single sphere of government or actor can achieve the global agendas alone.

LRGs have a democratic mandate and are state actors that want to contribute to shaping a multilateral system that places a greater emphasis on the role that sustainable urbanization and more balanced territorial development play in the achievement of the global development agendas.

This means that we need to consider and support the well-being of our communities in all territories, intermediary cities, metropolitan entities and regions. We need to strengthen urban-rural linkages and build balanced urban systems. Territorial cohesion needs adequate financial and capacity support for LRGs to leave no territory and no community behind. Rooting the 2030 Agenda implementation in territorial priorities allows for a collaborative and cooperative multi-level governance approach. Both city-to-city and region-to-region cooperation have a big transformative and mobilising potential, which should be better acknowledged, to foster awareness about shared goals and to bolster capacities at local level, as well as fostering citizens participation through inclusive mechanisms.

The localization of the SDGs requires multi-level governance, shared leadership, and multi-stakeholder coordination, incorporating the 2030 Agenda into local and regional plans, policies and actions. Improved coordination mechanisms based on the principles of subsidiarity and the respect of local autonomy, as well as civil society participation, are critical to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and promote local innovation.



The localization of the agendas remains as relevant as ever

LRGs and their networks are leading the global localization movement of the universal agendas: a testimony of our support towards territorial cohesion and leaving no one, and no place, behind. Only through effective coordination mechanisms and the establishment of synergies and interlinkages among institutions can we transform these commitments into action.

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, LRG involvement in monitoring and reporting processes has evolved. Over the past two years, the total number of VLRs available worldwide has doubled (from approximately 40 VLRs in June 2020 to more than 100 in June 2021). In the same period of time, 15 VSRs have emerged in 14 countries worldwide, which together represent more than 16,000 LRGs. However, LRGs and their associations' involvement in national reporting exercises is not making enough progress. In 2021, the percentage of LRGs that were consulted by their government in the VNR process has fallen, in spite of the efforts made by LRGs and LGAs to upscale local and subnational reporting. If the SDGs are to be achieved, it is critical to ensure the involvement of LRGs in the VNR processes, supported by resolutely more enabling institutional environment and disaggregated data. These should be seen as policy revision opportunities in order to create more traction and ownership of the Global Goals.



Our hopes for the 2021 HLPF

Efforts shared among LRGs and their networks and partners in maintaining service provision and ensuring the safety of their communities have been critical to mitigate the pandemic, and the world needs these efforts to continue to ensure a better normal.

LRGs are bringing to light the new essentials for a world that cares. The time has come to develop an enabling environment for women and girls to be represented in all facets of public life; of working for the sustainability of basic services as the cornerstone of the life of our communities; of fostering a new technology that enhances democracy and improves the quality of life for people; and of re-designing our cities and territories so all people can enjoy their lives with dignity.

In this sense, the constituency of LRGs calls on the HLPF to:

- ▶ **We call for strengthening health services and universal vaccination to all**, bolstering multi-stakeholder governance of the international system to respond to emergencies.
- ▶ **We call for the uninterrupted support of all spheres of government in ensuring health and human rights protection** to everyone and especially to the most marginalised and already structurally disadvantaged facets of population, including migrants and displaced persons.
- ▶ **In line with the Paris Agreement and IPCC Findings, we call for all efforts in the recovery to be geared towards delivering a** green and just recovery, and thus also contribute to reducing GHG emissions in order to keep global warming to the 1.5°C target.

- ▶ **We call to associate LRGs in the definition and implementation of the recovery packages** to ensure a safe, green and just recovery. Unlocking the means of implementation for LRGs will allow an equal, inclusive, and sustainable recovery of strategic sectors to achieve the SDGs.
- ▶ **We call on the international systems and national governments to promote the necessary reforms to strengthen the role and resources of LRGs.** Empowered LRGs are necessary, with adequate regulatory frameworks that encourage the alignment of national and territorial plans with the SDGs to ensure universal access to quality public services.
- ▶ **We call to guarantee access and participation in cultural life as an antidote to all crises,** and to acknowledge its essential role in the recovery of our communities with its power for social justice, freedoms, innovation and global fraternity.
- ▶ **We call for the recognition of the New Urban Agenda to act as an integral part of our response in the COVID-19 recovery** due to its accelerating potential of the achievement of the global goals, and its potential to territorialize the achievement of the Global Goals, building on a system of metropolitan and intermediary cities and building on the rural-urban continuum.
- ▶ **We call on the HLPF to recognise the critical role that migration plays towards sustainable development,** and call upon all Member States to join local governments to develop and implement policy measures that uphold the human rights of migrants and recognise the interlinkages between climate change, human mobility and urbanization, identifying common action to meet SDGs 10, 11 and 13 together.
- ▶ **We call for the involvement of LRGs in the VNR process and the full recognition of VLRs and VSRs** as part of the monitoring and reporting processes, as well as in official HLPF deliberation.
- ▶ **We call for a system in which LRGs are fully engaged by holding a permanent seat at the decision-making tables** representing the peoples they serve, and for a strong international community and updated UN system that reflects the current context, including LRGs in all stages of decision-making processes.
- ▶ **We reiterate the commitment of our organised constituency towards the localization of all the universal development agendas,** including the New Urban Agenda, the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Climate Agenda the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the Global Compact on Refugees. Only through achieving all agendas as one will we ensure a safe, equitable and green recovery that works for all.



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