



GLOBAL TASKFORCE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS

Statement at the 2023 UN Water Conference





The UN recognized the right to water and sanitation as "a fundamental right essential for the full enjoyment of the right to life and all human rights" and the SDG6 highlights the importance of integrated water resources management at all levels.

Still the right to water is denied, particularly at local and regional levels. The scarcity and deterioration of water quality exacerbate inequalities of access and the ongoing climate and biodiversity crisis are increasing the pressure. The very poorest people are the first to suffer. In many local and regional governments of least developed countries, Women are the most affected by climate change and water scarcity, since they are the ones who are generally in charge of distributing water. In many countries of the South, the most vulnerable populations are subject to water shortages. Most local and regional governments report as one of their main risk facing climate change as water management, as droughts and floods can have strong impact on water availability and water services.

Local and regional governments have a particular role to play, as key leaders of transformative actions at their level, and have been engaged in protecting their communities in such complex times, focusing on securing water supply and sanitation, avoiding water scarcity for all sectors, protecting aquatic ecosystems, and fostering care systems.

In addition, city and subnational diplomacy, paradiplomacy and regional territorial action around basin water management has worked to ensure that solidarity and delivery

of essential water services to those who need it most continues in the worst of times. To ensure we leave nobody and no place behind and achieve SDG6 and the other water-related SDGs, including the elimination of poverty and hunger, the reduction of inequalities, a more interconnected multilateral system based on multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder collaboration is required.

Our organized constituency reinstates our commitment to the transformation of the multilateral system driven by the power of collective action, under our strategic input towards the SDGs Summit and Summit for the Future.

This renewed multilateral system must consider the many aspects of an urban world: rural and urban territories, small and intermediate cities, metropolitan entities and regions. It must also provide financial support and capacity building for local and regional governments (LRGs) to engage in this process. An approach across government and society for addressing inequality, climate change and biodiversity, and for fostering peace is equally critical to changing our systems. The renewed multilateral system will also need to consider water and conflicts where water is being used as a weapon, war crimes or crimes against humanity related to water resources.

Local and regional governments, convened at the UCLG World Congress in Daejeon in October 2022, adopted a clear and ambitious political motion recalling the importance of management integrated and sustainable water policy led primarily by local and regional governments.

Strengthening local and regional public service provision to water and sanitation and ensure the right to access to safe drinking water and sanitation

The impact of the pandemic among those who already had less opportunities is tangible. Local and regional governments have been working to protect their communities even in these complex contexts, guaranteeing the continuity of basic services, by ensuring the provision of water, and working to halt evictions as well as safeguarding human rights of communities to access drinkable water and clean sanitation, as well agricultural, energy and industrial policies.

Local, Regional and community-led efforts are at the forefront to ensure equal access to water. The availability of water including drinking water/sanitation & cooling during heat waves can make cities more inclusive, liveable and resilient. Local and regional governments have a privileged position to acknowledge the role of communities and the urban commons, facilitating access to and management of water to communities, and scaling up commoning practices to ensure it is available to all. Strengthening cooperation across stakeholders, fostering public-people-partnerships and limiting speculative investments is a necessity to ensure the right to water and sanitation for all.

If water is to be seen as a right and as a public good, it is essential to overcome its commodification, ensuring that it is available

to all residents. To ensure that water remains a common good, it will be essential to address its provision, including the need to remunicipalise, deprivatise or enhance public management participatory governance and even bring commoning practices to the forefront.

In that regard, local and regional governments have a privileged position to provide transparent, efficient and inclusive management of water and sanitation services and to create enabling environments for exchange and learning to empower their communities. Participatory policy-making is crucial in order to implement integrated management plans for equitable and sustainable use of water resources and to ensure that public policies promote water and sanitation as a human right.

Protecting water ecosystems and biodiversity

Water is an urban catalyst and driver for various shocks and stresses in the local context. And therefore, crucial for the overall resilience of a city. Water also connects all of the Earth's ecosystems: it is not just a prerequisite for life; it is also an environment and a habitat. Aquatic ecosystems do not exist separately from other terrestrial and marine ecosystems. They belong to a continuum: streams and lakes join the sea through rivers, and the species that these environments support depend on this very continuum. Wetlands,



which are particularly rich in biodiversity, are under double pressure due to climate change, as terrestrial water supply decreases and sea level keeps rising.

Achieving better and sustainable life below water, and in all cities and territories, will only be possible through SDG localization processes that consider big and intermediate cities, small towns, and regions and territories. Good territorial development requires strategies that approach the territory as a multifunctional and connected system. Those strategies should also be inclusive of all relative topics, such as solid waste management on water bodies (specially the impact of plastics among other polluting debris), sustainable management of rural or urban agriculture, and public health water-related issues.

To replace our current extractive paradigm by a regenerative future, unsustainable resource use, population growth, inequality and the flawed economic system that have caused ecosystems decline must be systematically addressed. **Our relationship with our ecosystems has to evolve through structural changes towards new economic models, new production and consumption systems, and climate change adaptation and mitigation plans that guarantee a shift towards systems of care that protect and promote environmental rights and eliminate inequity in order to support and strengthen all climate actions. Environmental education as well as culture will be key factors for the sustainable development of the next generations.**

Local and regional governments, as frontliners, are essential to embody a vision for a better life below water as well as water biodiversity management as the closest level of government to communities and as the protectors of the biodiversity of their territories. They can engage multiple spheres of government and stakeholders across sectors in a coordinated manner, facilitating cooperation, trust and mutual learning, as well as greater inclusivity and justice.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Efforts shared among local and regional governments and their networks and partners in maintaining local service provision and fostering cooperation on water through city and subnational diplomacy and regional basin management will be critical to reach these shared objectives.

Local and regional governments are critical to develop and foster decentralized cooperation and regional knowledge-sharing and capacity building hubs among cities and regions in order to share, replicate and improve continuously best practices. While reaffirming that water is a common good, local and regional governments are highlighting the new fundamentals of a caring world. The time has come to build an environment that provides the core services required for our communities to live and thrive through more assertive support from national governments and international donors as well as exchanges of experience

between local governments. Protect water as a public good and human right, and as an essential public service and as a public service that can then be attributed to its provision by different operators; strengthen the localization of SDG6 to promote local and regional ownership and achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

In this sense, the constituency of local and regional governments calls on the Co-Chairs and Member-States:

On human rights:

1. **Encourage ongoing support from all tiers of government to ensure access to water and sanitation services for all**, and sustainable water management and, particularly, for the most vulnerable segments of the population as a human right. Highlight the issue of access to services for marginalized populations (migrants, homeless, etc.), particularly, in countries that are otherwise advanced in terms of access to services or in countries most exposed to such flows.
2. **Foster women and girls inclusion in water management, including in position of responsibility**, and promote participatory, inclusive approaches that ensure all voices are accounted for and represented in decision-making.
3. **Build upon the display of care provided by local and regional governments** over

the past years and recognize care as the dimension that needs to be incorporated into any and all policy decisions **to protect the most vulnerable, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons, and those living in informality.**

On sustainable management:

1. **Strengthen capacities of local and regional governments in building sustainable management models of our ecosystems and biodiversity** to protect water as a public good, including the collection of best practices on sustainable management of water ecosystems by local and regional governments
2. **Develop and implement policies addressing underground water pollutions at a national, river basin and aquifer scale**, an allocate means of action to local governments to enforce them;
3. **Develop an integrated and comprehensive approach at all levels of government including water and sanitation as the core components, alongside related topics, such as solid waste management, agriculture, and environmental health.** Encourage stakeholders to consider a prevention approach at the source of pollution. This approach differs from traditional approaches that make the treatment of pollution the only answer to environmental health challenges.



4.
Set up an enabling environment for local and regional governments to implement, run and regulate efficient, and user-centered essential services, such as safe water production and supply, wastewater management, and solid waste management.

On the governance of water:

1.
Strengthen the role of regions, intermediary cities, small towns, and rural areas and territories in the achievement of the universal development agendas, softening the asymmetries in the distribution of water capacities and supporting the role of regional governments in bridging the urban-rural divide.

2.
Highlight the crucial role of multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder collaboration in the managing water ecosystems and the inclusion of cities, regions and territories in water related policy making.

3.
Guarantee universal access through a strong role of the management in the public sector.

4.
Renew the collaboration with the private sector in the achievement of SDG6 in particular through innovation, new financing mechanisms and private sector investment in water and sanitation.

5.
Deploy groundwater management and monitoring solutions, including the use of nature-based solutions, and reinforce coordination, harmonization, data-sharing and scientific cooperation between neighbouring states and regions, either for surface water or groundwater.

6.
Raise awareness with communities on water management and include them in the decision making.

7.
Foster a renewed, more inclusive, multilateral system based on ownership, co-creation and peace, including the added value of decentralized cooperation on water and sanitation and engaging local and regional governments and their representative associations in all stages of decision-making processes.

On the governance frameworks to achieve SDG 6:

1.
National governments to recognize local and regional governments' key and critical role in implementing sustainable local economic development through the principle of subsidiarity, and to substantially increase national budgets for securing water resources, in order to empower local and regional governments to act.

2.
Recognize the importance of city and subnational diplomacy and paradiplomacy and regional basin management as the

transformative diplomacy that local and regional governments can bring to the table in managing water governance and provision and the key role that decentralized cooperation can play as an integral element to enhance our ability to foster peace and solidarity, in particular regarding knowledge exchange in water systems and resilience.

3.

Development banks and central banks, to provide direct access to financing for "Climate-Biodiversity" projects of cities and local and regional governments and to allow bidding in all official languages of the United Nations.

4.

Climate donors, to increase the funding available to cities and local and regional governments for the implementation of concrete actions designed to provide better reception and integration conditions for climate migrants and reduce the climate risks associated with population displacement in urban areas, as well as the high risk in the guarantee of water supply and competition between all types of uses; drinking water, irrigation to secure food sovereignty, or essential ecological flows to protect ecosystems and biodiversity, water efficiency, desalinated or regenerated water.

5.

Develop innovative financial solidarity mechanisms at local and regional level, and rethink fiscal architecture, strengthen local and regional finance to provide sufficient financial capacity to reach the SDG targets. Establish instruments - at

the national and multilateral levels - to finance water savings at national, regional and local levels, with priority given to areas under great quantitative pressure. This financing could be a priority of philanthropic organizations.



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