

**Local Authorities Major Group
Full Sectoral Position Paper
High-Level Political Forum 2020
With inputs of organizations gathered in the Global Taskforce of Local and
Regional Governments**

Introduction

Local and regional governments share the concern of the international community and the United Nations Secretary General with regard to the need to embolden ambitions and accelerate the pace of transformation to achieve the universal development agendas in light of the start of the implementation decade. This is especially the case in these trying times, with the unprecedented crisis the entire world is facing. As the COVID-19 pandemic is making clear beyond any doubt, development agendas need to be addressed with stronger support to local and regional governments and their associations, and must be prioritized in light of the curve of the current unsustainable trajectory.

The current state of affairs for the implementation of the SDGs lacks the transformative approach that is necessary to respond to the humanitarian crises that stem from COVID-19. It is clear that we cannot overcome this crisis alone, and that a stronger multilateral system driven by transformative diplomacy is the way forward, prioritizing a whole of government and whole of society approach. Greater recognition is needed to the role that all levels of government play in achieving the 2030 Agenda as it is clear that multilevel governance and international cooperation and solidarity will be the only way to truly safeguard the rights and health of communities.

The multilateral governance system must recognize the essential role that local and regional governments and their national associations are playing in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in protecting citizens at the frontline via local public service delivery. Public service delivery is indispensable as a means to support sanitary measures and to prevent the economic crisis from transforming into a deeper social crisis and is the basis upon which the achievement of the global goals will happen. Moreover, it will be key in addressing the structural inequalities that characterize our world today as local and regional governments work on the ground to contribute to the sustainability and resilience of society. In this sense, awareness raising to citizens on the importance of local solidarity is an essential step to ensure an inclusive recovery – a step that also falls most naturally on local and regional governments.

The efforts shared among local and regional governments, supported by their associations, networks, civil society organizations and other stakeholders through decentralized cooperation will prove to be key to solve the interconnected challenges that our world is facing including the most pressing global trends such as climate change, biodiversity loss, changing demographics, the impact of new technologies, and inequality which remain persistent as does the inadequacy of the world's response. In these trying times, there is a **window of opportunity to bend the curve of the current unsustainable trajectory and, as the pandemic is demonstrating, all development agendas need to be underpinned by adequate access to public service provision** driven by strong local and regional governments close to the communities they serve.

Local public service provision during and beyond the outbreak

Local and regional governments and their associations are working tirelessly at the frontline to safeguard the rights and health of communities via local public service delivery. From health services to water and waste management, from housing and mobility to

services related to digital technologies, from education to food security and services that protect the most vulnerable facets of the population such as women and children, people living and working in informal contexts, persons with disabilities, and migrants and refugees, it is clear that the sustainability of local public service delivery must be maintained to contain the pandemic, address inequalities and protect the most vulnerable during and beyond the crisis.

With regard to housing, local and regional governments have worked to maintain stay at home policies taking the lead in providing responses to the local housing challenges triggered by the COVID-19 crisis by preventing evictions, providing rent and mortgage deferrals, and ensuring the homeless have access to housing. The crisis has emphasized that inclusive housing systems are key for sustainable urban development and that we must ensure that access to housing is a right and not simply an asset. It is clear that multi-stakeholder partnerships and a whole-of-government approach is critical to develop a long-term human rights based strategy towards housing which recognizes the right to adequate housing and its seven criteria (security of tenure; availability of services; habitability; affordability; accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy).

In relation to mobility, local and regional governments have highlighted their crucial role in ensuring essential services are maintained with safe and sustainable public transport for all. As the current crisis is demonstrating, local and regional governments are committed to maintaining public transport as a vital public service meant to giving people access to opportunity and leading the transition for a just and sustainable urban future in the post COVID-19 reconstruction phase.

Concerning waste management, local and regional governments guaranteed the continuity of proper waste management services, including separate collection and recycling, ensured adequate planning of capacities for treatment and, where necessary, storage of medical waste, and took measures to protect the health and safety of waste management operators.

Technology, moreover, has proved key to the response of COVID-19 as local and regional governments work to ensure that technology protects and safeguards the communities' health as well as fights the digital divide. With important restrictions in place on the movement of people, the functioning of services, and rules on physical distancing, technology can have a profound effect on citizen's daily lives and ensure them access to health services, access to information, and communication with competent authorities, among other things. Within this context, local and regional governments are working tirelessly to ensure that citizens are at the forefront of new technologies and that their digital rights are protected including principles of privacy, freedom of expression and democracy.

With regard to informality, the challenge posed by addressing COVID-19 in informal settlements is highly complex, as most of the policy responses that are being adopted to curb the virus' spread in formal contexts are not applicable in informal ones. Local and regional governments have been working to protect workers in the informal economy and ensuring their safety, by sanitizing transport, engaging with informal communities and ensuring provision of food, and working to halt evictions to ensure the spread of the virus and safeguarding the health and human rights of communities. Steps need to be taken to ensure a framework to acknowledge the informal economy, endowing local and regional governments with sufficient resources and acknowledging community-led initiatives as necessary conditions to achieve effective COVID-19 responses.

In addition, it is vital that in the response to the crisis, all levels of government keep the SDGs and climate commitments in focus. To build back better, the recovery should include investments towards a more inclusive and sustainable future. The economic disruption created by the crisis is leading to a reconsideration of resource use and the fragility of supply lines. Resources need to be redirected to strengthen approaches that enhance both resilience and efficiency, such as circular

economy, transition to renewables, and raising the ambition of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) which should be a product of multi-level government collaboration. Recovery strategies should stimulate preparedness and adaptation efforts alongside ambitious mitigation efforts in coordination and collaboration with local and regional governments.

During the crisis, cultural initiatives have also played a fundamental role to guarantee access to information, encourage awareness and tolerance, connect heritage and creativity, promote well-being and resilience in individuals and communities, and build capacity to imagine the societies of the future. The COVID-19 crisis has made evident that culture is a pillar of people's lives. It is time for bold steps to be taken so that long-term development programmes, such as the UN Decade of Action for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, are coherent with this fact, with a renewed support to cultural initiatives and infrastructure, an in-depth collective reflection upon the relationship between cultural rights, democracy, freedom, public space and well-being, as well as a more visible presence of international cultural cooperation and solidarity.

The Local Authorities Major Group calls for:

- **The development agendas to be addressed as one and for their need to be reinforced by public local service provision** driven by strong local and regional governments and associations close to the communities they serve.
- **The uninterrupted support of all levels of government in ensuring the health and human rights protection** to everyone and especially to the most vulnerable facets of the population and the **sustainability and resilience** of the environment at large.
- **The maintenance of all essential services and the need to ensure that our communities are safeguarded**, which can only occur via strengthened peer to peer exchange and decentralized cooperation, empowered local and regional governments through effective decentralization policies and modalities, and a renewed multilateral system which reflects the global reality we are all living in.
- **The promotion of culture as the fourth pillar of development** in the UN Decade of Action, with specific targets devoted to heritage, creativity, diversity and knowledge.

Strengthened multilateralism

The constituency of Local and Regional Authorities is convinced that that the 2030 Agenda is an adequate framework for the transformation required for the COVID-19 aftermath and that no one sole actor can achieve the global agendas alone. All levels of government must work together to achieve sustainable development and the process must be bottom-up whereby the 2030 Agenda is incorporated into local and regional plans and policies and the SDGs are localized at the territorial level.

This requires multilevel and multi-stakeholder coordination as well as the financial support and capacity development for local and regional governments to effectively participate in national and international policy making processes and hence localize the SDGs. Rooting the 2030 Agenda's implementation in local and regional priorities would allow for the creation of a new framework of governance that is meaningful and practical in the day-to-day lives of citizens. To do this, a truly supportive environment for local and regional governments that follows the principle of subsidiarity and prioritizes decentralization is necessary.

The crisis that we currently face highlights the need for global and national plans that contain recovery measures that reach all territories implemented through effective collaboration and multilevel governance arrangements involving all spheres of governments. Localization requires a

new governance approach, with local democracy at its core, and strengthened local self-government. Dialogue among all spheres of government must be a reality to ensure that the needs of communities are considered moving forward.

The inclusion of civil society groups in decision making will also prove to be vital to ensuring that no one and no place is left behind. Grassroots organizations ensure proper coordination amongst communities and local institutions concentrating on the needs of people on the ground as the closest organizations to the population. The local and regional government constituency recognizes the importance of strong alliances with different internationally organized communities and civil society to ensure that a space of structural dialogue is created and that both local and global policies are developed in an open and informed format based on inclusion, diversity and region-specific priorities.

Within this context, we underscore the necessity for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) to create space to discuss innovative governance mechanisms between local, regional and national governments, and call for an inclusive HLPF that promotes and institutionalizes strong dialogue with local and regional governments and stakeholders, and in which all spheres of government have a platform to follow-up, present and exchange their efforts to avoid leaving local and regional governance behind and territorial cohesion absent. As it has been made clear by the pandemic, the provision of public services and the involvement of local communities has proven to be essential for addressing the crisis. The efforts shared among local and regional governments, supported by their networks, civil society and the private sector through peer-learning and decentralized cooperation, will prove to be key to solve the interconnected challenges that our world faces, and accelerate action for the achievement of the SDGs.

The Local Authorities Major Group calls for:

- **The 2030 agenda to act as an existing roadmap in the post COVID-19 response period and for the New Urban Agenda to act as an integral part our response which, due to its accelerating potential, would allow for the achievement of the global goals.**
- **A strengthened multilateral governance system that is based on solid multilevel governance, with citizens at the core,** prioritizing a whole of society approach and multi-stakeholder collaboration, and acknowledging the ecosystem of local and regional governments in light of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations.

Inequalities

Addressing inequalities will entail not only the issue of income disparities and poverty as well as access to housing and livelihoods, but it will also be integral for it to entail the inequalities of political and public participation as well as the recognition of rights for communities that are often invisible. **The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the inequalities and shortcomings that we were already aware of.** The need to bridge the digital divide is more crucial than ever, as we enter the era of work-from home and accessing education indoors. It will be necessary to carry out an equality framework to urban planning, legislation, and development to ensure full inclusion and participation for all.

The pandemic has also exacerbated the inequalities between women and men, and it will be critical to avoid any form of regression, particularly with regard to the harassment and violence against women and girls and see gender equality as an integral solution to the challenges that we face in terms of health, climate, economy, and fundamental human rights.

Partnerships between spheres of governments and civil society will need to be fostered to ensure that the new normality is that of a more egalitarian world, that has adopted the framework of the universal development agendas as the way forward. A territorial approach to addressing inequalities will need to be developed, acknowledging polycentrism in metropolitan areas and urban systems as well as the urban-rural continuum.

The Local Authorities Major Group calls for:

- **The development of pathways to equality**, which can only occur through providing all stakeholders with a seat at the global table to leave no one and no place behind in decision-making processes.
- **Addressing inequalities among territories, through a territorial approach to development that bridges the urban rural divide.**

Financing

To ensure that the needs of communities are adequately responded to and that local public service delivery continues to protect citizens and our commons, we must ensure that a change of financial paradigm is carried out to allow access for local and regional governments to critical and adequate financial resources to fully realize the global agendas. **For this to be possible, territorial and fiscal decentralization must go hand-in-hand with renewed mechanisms for local and regional governments to finance their own needs and aspirations.**

Localizing finance and investment must be a common ambition stemming from efforts from all actors at all levels of government and must be concentrated on and promote renewed frameworks of dialogue, consultation and cooperation. Local finance and financial decentralization strategies would allow local and regional governments to not only serve the needs of their communities and have access to resources necessary to finance critical infrastructure but also to enhance creativity and innovation at the territorial level.

During times of crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is beyond any doubt that direct access to critical financial resources by local and regional governments would work towards preventing social, environmental and economic consequences. The crisis needs to make us re-evaluate how local and regional governments access financing, and calls for developing stimulus measures as part of recovery policies to ensure the sustainability of basic services, in order to be able to exercise public spending and prevent the sanitary crisis from becoming a social crisis. Beyond this, reassessing the role of public debt will be necessary to facilitate greater access to capital markets for local and regional governments while preventing crises like the one we are facing from hampering the development of future generations.

We further encourage international partners, donors and other relevant stakeholders to prioritize local financing and facilitate access of local and regional governments to national and international capital markets in order to address local infrastructure and recovery needs. We further encourage to enhance synergies with the Financing for Development agenda.

International systems and national governments must promote the reforms necessary to strengthen municipal and regional governments' fiscal autonomy and enhance intergovernmental transfers together with adequate regulatory frameworks that allow for the alignment of national, regional and local plans, in order to finally unlock the means of implementation for local and

regional governments to carry out the global goals. Local social and economic actors must be recognized as first drivers of long-term financing strategies.

The Local Authorities Major Group calls for:

- **The financial support and capacity development for local and regional governments to** ensure the full implementation of the universal development agendas including additional financial support dedicated to peer to peer learning in all regions of the world.
- **The strengthening of financial frameworks** and carrying out the necessary reforms to strengthen local and regional governments' resources and access to finance to carry out effective service delivery and recovery measures during and in the aftermath of the outbreak

The commitment of the constituency on localization

Local and regional governments 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.

Localization goes beyond city boundaries. A full territorial approach, based on a system of cities and mindful of the rural and urban continuum can promote both innovation and sustainable development and can help contribute to making our society more inclusive and resilient. This can build on the strength of our communities and provide a new frame for the co-creation of our cities, regions and territories.

Voluntary National Review (VNR) reporting continues to show that localization varies widely across countries and it is critical to revise the strategies to mobilize and involve local and regional governments in the reporting and within relevant coordination mechanisms. If the SDGs are to be achieved, it is critical to ensure the involvement of local and regional governments in the SDG processes, as well as the availability of local, and gender-disaggregated data. There is a need to better balance efforts on reporting to resourcing and driving change. These should be seen as policy revision opportunities in order to create more traction and ownership of the Goals.

Fostering the development of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) is essential to stimulate bottom-up transformation to accelerate implementation of the SDGs. VLRs are more than just a monitoring and evaluation tool: they embody the commitment of local and regional governments in taking on the universal agendas at the whole-of-government and whole-of-society level. Moreover, they act as a learning and training tool for public officials; as a mechanism of transparency and accountability to promote increased citizen involvement, and as a lever to boost joint ownership of the global goals

The Local Authorities Major Group calls for:

- **Bolstering local and regional involvement** in the monitoring and reporting processes of the global agendas to ensure the transformation that we require answers to the call of communities.

- **The development of innovative governance mechanisms**, to institutionalize dialogue among local and regional governments and all stakeholders in the coordination of the SDGs' implementation to avoid leaving local governance behind.
- **The provision of inclusive, transparent and available data** to monitor progress at all levels of governance.

Conclusion

The implementation of the global agendas and transformation of our societies will not happen without a strong enabling environment for local and regional governments. It is essential to develop the next generation of multilateralism and a new culture of collaboration between all spheres of government, with local democracy and territorial governance at its core, to respond to the challenges of the upcoming years by co-creating policies based on the involvement of our communities.

The transformational framework of the Sustainable Development Goals remains relevant to carry out the transformation that our planet requires, especially so in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency and the impending global trends. The New Urban Agenda, the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, and the Paris Agreement, will need to be the accelerators to bring about innovative solutions to solve these interconnected challenges and bring about a more sustainable and equal world.

The implementation decade that is just beginning will be the moment to take collective ownership, along with all stakeholders, of the universal development agendas and to bring about a local-global movement to contribute to the wellbeing of humanity and life on earth. **We reiterate the commitment of our organized constituency towards the localization of all the universal development agendas**, as well as to fostering the development of Voluntary Local and Regional Reviews, promoted by local and regional Government associations, with inputs from all local and regional governments within a territory.