

Local Authorities Major Group (LAMG)

Gathered within the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (LRGs)

HLPF 2025 Sectoral Position Paper

Introduction

As the world reaches the final stretch toward the 2030 Agenda, the 2025 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) provides a vital opportunity to affirm the role of local and regional governments (LRGs) in delivering sustainable, inclusive, and care-centred development. Reviewing SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14, and 17, HLPF 2025 underscores the need to localize responses to intersecting crises of inequality, democratic erosion, social fragmentation, and planetary emergency. LRGs are not just implementers—they are co-creators of public policy and frontline actors in translating global commitments into territorial realities through public services grounded in rights, care, and proximity.

In the current landscape, a renewed social contract must be built from the bottom up. LRGs, by virtue of their democratic mandate and proximity to residents, uphold a territorial approach to rights that includes access to health, education, housing, care, and a healthy environment. These services are the infrastructure of care, equality and resilience.

This contribution from the Local Authorities Major Group (LAMG) builds on the Local SDG Rescue Plan and the Global Strategy of the Secretary-General's Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments (LRGs). It reaffirms our commitment to human rights, democratic local action, and the universal provision of local public services. It proposes pathways for care-based governance and multilevel collaboration as foundations for a renewed global agenda. Localizing the SDGs and all global agendas remains one of the most effective means to rebuild trust, reduce inequality, and advance sustainable development and social inclusion for all.

Caring for People: Public services and care as foundations of SDGs 3, 5 and 8

Health and care as a local and global common (SDG 3)

The achievement of SDG 3 is inseparable from the provision of accessible, equitable, and universal access to healthcare, health services, and healthy cities and territories. LRGs are essential to this agenda, as they are responsible for delivering primary healthcare, sanitation, housing, mobility, a healthy environment and the public infrastructure that shape people's daily lives. Their proximity to communities enables a nuanced understanding of the social, spatial, and environmental determinants of health, positioning them to promote well-being through prevention and integrated care.

Health is a multidimensional phenomenon. Urban health challenges are shaped by a range of interacting drivers—climate change, poverty, food insecurity, inequality, environmental degradation and lack of biodiversity, and demographic shifts—that converge spatially and disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. Living in deprived neighborhoods, informal settlements, or polluted urban environments drastically alters people's exposure to health risks. Rural areas face limited access to health and care services, with ageing and

depopulation driving up local service costs. Achieving health equity requires place-based responses that address underlying socio-ecological conditions.

LRGs are increasingly adopting care-centered and holistic approaches that go beyond the biomedical model. By coordinating across sectors and levels of government, they link public health with housing, transport, water and sanitation, and urban planning. From tackling air pollution and unsafe WASH conditions to supporting healthy mobility and community mental health, LRGs are drivers of systemic solutions that align with a 'Health in All Policies' approach.

Embedding health equity into local governance requires inclusive policy processes, integrated planning, and reliable subnational data systems. Strengthening LRGs' mandates, resources, and capacities is a precondition for delivering on the promise of SDG 3, particularly in fast-growing urban areas where infrastructure deficits and social vulnerabilities are high. This includes empowering LRGs to co-create local health strategies with communities and national governments and supporting their participation in international frameworks.

The LAMG calls for:

- Scaling up investment in care-centered local public health systems as a foundation for resilient, inclusive societies.
- Recognizing LRGs' role in public health policy-making and service provision within national and international frameworks.
- Supporting LRG efforts to promote mental health and well-being through local public health systems, and to deliver integrated, youth-focused interventions addressing digital isolation, education, environmental stress, and other emerging challenges.
- Advancing a territorial and socio-ecological model of health that acknowledges the territorial-specific challenges of urban, peri-urban and rural areas and the interlinkages between urban planning, public service delivery, and community well-being.

Gender equality and feminist municipalism (SDG 5)

SDG 5 can only be achieved through grounded, transformative action at the local level. Gender equality is not a sectoral issue but a structural dimension of sustainable development that requires a comprehensive shift in the way policies are designed, implemented, and evaluated. LRGs are key actors in shaping inclusive institutions and services that eliminate discrimination and violence, redistribute care, and promote the full and equal participation of women and girls in public life.

The role of LRGs in promoting gender equality is embedded in their daily work to provide essential public services that protect rights and support the autonomy of women and girls. This includes access to health care, housing, mobility, education, culture, decent work, and public safety. LRGs have a direct impact on the social, economic and environmental conditions that shape women's lives, particularly those experiencing multiple forms of discrimination.

Women's political participation at the local level is an essential condition for advancing SDG 5. Female mayors, councillors, and local leaders are reshaping governance to prioritize care, equality, sustainability, and social justice, while building inclusive institutions that challenge entrenched patriarchal structures. Their leadership not only enhances local democracy but is

essential to developing gender-responsive policies that genuinely reflect community needs and realities. Despite this, women remain underrepresented in decision-making structures at all levels. Structural barriers, underinvestment in women's leadership, and limited access to political spaces must be urgently addressed.

Feminist approaches to local governance address inequalities in power, access, and outcomes. Through gender-responsive planning, inclusive representation, and equitable service provision, LRGs challenge structural inequalities and contribute to building democratic, inclusive, and caring societies. This includes recognizing the value of care work (paid and unpaid), redefining policy priorities to reflect gender equality, and institutionalizing gender-sensitive budgeting and decision-making processes.

LRGs are also essential in preventing and addressing gender-based violence through the provision of services and the creation of safe public spaces. Their work is key to guaranteeing women's participation and involvement in politics and leadership, particularly at the grassroots and community levels, and to promoting a culture of equality and non-discrimination.

To achieve lasting progress, LRGs must be supported in developing and implementing comprehensive, long-term strategies for gender equality that are co-created and sustained with feminist movements and civil society, rooted in public institutions, and protected by legal and financial frameworks. Such strategies should also support the autonomy and agency of women in all their diversity and enable their effective participation in governance processes.

As the international community reflects on the legacy of the Beijing Platform for Action, the leadership and contributions of LRGs to achieving SDG 5 must be fully recognized and reinforced.

The Local and Regional Government constituency calls for:

- Integrating feminist and care-centered approaches into local policy frameworks.
- Ensuring meaningful the participation and leadership opportunities of women and girls in all levels of local decision-making and governance.
- Supporting local governments with the legal mandates, institutional capacity, and financing required to advance gender equality and fully implement the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action at the territorial level.

Decent work and inclusive local economies (SDG 8)

The promotion of decent work and inclusive economic development is a shared responsibility that requires coordinated action across all levels of government. LRGs are uniquely placed to foster local economies that are people-centered, sustainable, and rooted in solidarity. They contribute to economic resilience by promoting employment, supporting entrepreneurship, and investing in care and service sectors that meet social needs.

Territorial approaches to economic development strengthen the link between public services, decent work, and social protection. LRGs play a strategic role in enabling access to work for historically excluded groups through training, employment services, and public employment schemes. This work is particularly important in contexts of informality, precarity, and growing inequalities, where access to decent employment is a prerequisite for inclusion and autonomy.

A just transition to inclusive and sustainable economies must prioritize investments that generate decent jobs and contribute to the well-being of communities. This includes recognizing care work as a sector of strategic importance, aligning local economic policies with sustainability goals, and ensuring the active participation of workers, particularly women and youth, in economic governance.

Local and regional governments should be supported in advancing economic strategies that go beyond profit-maximization, by promoting models based on solidarity, mutual support, and collective ownership. This includes backing social and solidarity economy initiatives, cooperatives, community enterprises, and other locally rooted forms of economic organization that reinvest in communities and center social value over capital accumulation. These models are essential to building inclusive, resilient economies that reflect the priorities and realities of local populations.

The Local and Regional Government constituency calls for:

- Expanding support for local employment and skills initiatives that target excluded groups.
- Supporting LRGs in fostering local economies based on social protection and decent work.
- Promoting territorially-based strategies for inclusive economic development, including negotiated local pacts that engage trade unions, employers, civil society, and public institutions in coordinated action at the local level.

Caring for the Planet: Ocean action and sustainability (SDG 14)

Sustainable ocean and coastal ecosystems are essential for the health of the planet and the well-being of its people

The ocean plays a central role in regulating climate, sustaining biodiversity, supporting food systems, and providing livelihoods—particularly for coastal and island communities. LRGs are uniquely positioned to connect ocean protection with everyday governance through land-use planning, waste management, water treatment, and nature-based solutions. Despite their central role, SDG 14 remains among the least funded and politically supported goals, and ocean governance continues to be fragmented and sectoral in approach.

LRGs are advancing community-led restoration initiatives, co-managing protected areas, and integrating circular economy and blue economy principles into territorial development strategies. These contributions remain largely invisible in global monitoring frameworks. Strengthening LRG participation in national and international ocean governance is essential to address the current ecological emergency and advance a truly integrated and inclusive ocean agenda.

Integrated coastal zone management, sustainable land-use planning, and freshwater-marine linkages are vital to reduce land-based pollution, restore critical ecosystems such as wetlands and mangroves, and build marine resilience. Intermediary cities and small towns—often overlooked in global marine discussions—must be empowered to lead within broader territorial strategies, ensuring that ocean protection benefits all communities and not just those along the coast.

LRGs call for the formal recognition of the ocean as a common, anchored in rights-based and community-driven principles. The connection between SDG 14 and other key goals—such as those related to water (SDG 6), food systems (SDG 2), gender equality (SDG 5), climate resilience (SDG 13), and cities (SDG 11)—underscores the need for systemic responses across all levels of government. Marine protection must go hand in hand with access to basic services, food security, climate justice, and cultural preservation, particularly in territories that rely directly on ocean resources.

Locally-led initiatives are at the forefront regulating tourism, supporting small-scale fisheries, creating early warning systems, and leading the ecological just transition through innovative and inclusive policies. However, their actions are constrained by inadequate mandates, financing gaps, and limited access to marine policy spaces. The UN Ocean Conference and the Ocean Decade Mid-Term Review must serve to rectify this by establishing institutional spaces for LRGs, increasing ocean finance, and enabling cross-sectoral partnerships grounded in local realities.

The Local and Regional Government constituency calls for:

- Strengthening multilevel governance mechanisms that formally include LRGs in global ocean action frameworks.
- Expanding technical and financial support to LRGs for ocean and coastal governance through nature-based and community-led approaches.
- Promoting the recognition of the ocean as a shared common, and ensuring the leadership of LRGs in shaping marine agendas and implementing SDG 14 on the ground.

Caring for Government: Governance for impact (SDG 17)

Multilevel governance and transformative partnerships

Accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in its final stretch demands governance systems rooted in shared responsibility, institutional coherence, and democratic legitimacy across all levels of government and involvement of the citizens. LRGs are not only service providers—they are political actors whose mandates and contributions must be fully acknowledged within national and international frameworks.

Multilevel governance strengthens democratic institutions and enables policy coherence by bridging national objectives with local realities. It fosters inclusive, participatory decision-making and ensures that the voices of communities are represented in the design, implementation, and monitoring of public policy. Grounded in the Pact for the Future, this vision of governance calls for a renewed multilateralism that is inclusive, networked, and responsive to the complexity of today's global challenges.

Strengthening formal mechanisms for LRG participation in intergovernmental and UN decision-making bodies is essential for transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in SDG implementation. This includes enhancing LRG engagement from an early stage in follow-up and review processes and ensuring that subnational experiences inform global and national policymaking.

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) are vital instruments for reinforcing multilevel governance. They contribute concrete, disaggregated data; support peer learning; and cultivate a shared culture of evidence-based planning and policy follow-up. Their full integration into Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and national SDG strategies can strengthen coherence, promote joint ownership of development outcomes, and close the implementation gap.

Decentralized cooperation, as a practice of peer-to-peer collaboration between territories, complements multilateral efforts by facilitating mutual learning, solidarity-based partnerships and peer to peers, and capacity-building across borders. As a driver of innovation and territorial diplomacy, decentralized cooperation is essential to connecting global agendas with local realities and enhancing LRG leadership in sustainable development.

An enabling environment that fosters collaboration among all levels of government—supported by scientific expertise, innovative financing, and trust-building—is critical to delivering coordinated and locally grounded solutions to global challenges.

The Local and Regional Government constituency calls for:

- Formal recognition of LRGs as political actors in national, regional, and global governance frameworks.
- The systematic integration of VLRs and VSRs into national SDG strategies, VNRs, and policy planning processes.
- Strengthened mechanisms for structured LRG participation and involvement in UN decision-making and follow-up bodies to ensure more accountable, inclusive, and networked multilateralism.

Financing the future of care and sustainability

Strengthening local public finance is essential to enable LRGs to fulfill their mandates in the final stretch of the 2030 Agenda. Despite being responsible for the implementation of a large share of the SDG targets, LRGs continue to face structural barriers in accessing adequate, predictable, and sustainable financing and funding. Expanding local fiscal space through improved domestic and local resource mobilization, intergovernmental transfers, and dedicated instruments for local investment is necessary to match responsibilities with resources and unlock transformative action at the territorial level.

Public finance must prioritize care systems, infrastructure, ecological transformation, and social protection—areas where LRGs are closest to needs and most capable of delivering impact. Financing approaches should incorporate principles of equity, gender responsiveness, and sustainability. The alignment of national and international finance systems with local priorities is needed to support investments in essential services such as water, education, health, mobility, and housing. LRGs are also promoting budgetary practices that reflect the values of inclusion and long-term territorial resilience.

Mechanisms to monitor the allocation and impact of finance at the local level are critical to ensuring transparency, coherence, and mutual accountability. Going forward, multilevel dialogue and coordination will be essential to embed the needs of territories into the global financial governance agenda.

The Local and Regional Government constituency calls for:

- Reforming global financial systems to channel adequate, inclusive and long-term resources to the local level.
- Supporting LRG innovation in public finance and investment aligned with care and gender equality.
- Establishing intergovernmental mechanisms to monitor and support the localization of finance, including regular reporting and joint commitments on local public investment.