

Local Authorities Major Group Full Sectoral Position Paper High-Level Political Forum 2021

Introduction

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. Crises stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic have shown the intrinsic link between local public service provision and health systems and the importance that service provision plays in protecting people, the planet, and fostering prosperity and care for all. **Local and regional sustainable policymaking and public service provision have been critical to link our health systems and the universal development agendas.**

The ongoing COVID-19 crisis has underscored that we are only as strong as the most vulnerable among us, and that the only way to achieve a sustainable recovery that leaves no-one behind is by incorporating the principles of equity and solidarity. This calls for a stronger multilevel system that can truly foster the transformations needed to localize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), prioritizing a whole of government and whole of society approach.

Localization requires multilevel governance, shared leadership, and multi-stakeholder coordination across the globe, incorporating the 2030 Agenda into local and regional plans, policies and actions. As we are beginning to, unequally, enter the recovery, we need to acknowledge that local service provision remains integral to achieve the global goals we set for ourselves.

The multilateral system needs to consider the many dimensions of an urban world: a system of rural and urban territories, small and intermediary cities, metropolitan entities and regions; and delivering financial support and capacity development for local and regional governments (LRG) to participate in transformation. If we are to leave no place behind, we need to ensure that the rural world gains presence in global debates, in particular when formulating policies with a long-term horizon. Rooting the 2030 Agenda implementation in territorial priorities allows for a new governance framework, improving day-to-day life.

The New Urban Agenda is a critical element to foster territorial systems that are able to lead the recovery. The necessity to expand health, food and service systems beyond metropolitan areas is now a priority for most countries around the world. The symbiosis between the urban and the rural world will define investments all around the world and it has also reached the agenda of the most powerful economies of the planet gathered under the G20 with a focus on intermediary cities.

Local public service provision for an equitable recovery

Throughout the worst of the pandemic, it has often been local and regional governments, 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 sanitary measures.

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 an era where work-from home and accessing education indoors will become more common. It will be necessary to carry out an equality framework to urban planning, legislation, and development to ensure full inclusion and participation of all.

The impact of the pandemic among those who already had less opportunities is tangible. Workers and persons living in informality, women, children, people without a proper access to digital tools, people with disability and older persons have been among the hardest hit. 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, ensuring the provision of food, and working to halt evictions as well as safeguarding the health and human rights of communities. Local and regional governments have also worked to protect women from situations of violence in the pandemic delivering gender-based responses. **Steps need to be taken to ensure a framework to acknowledge the informal economy, endowing LRGs and their associations with sufficient resources and acknowledging community-led initiatives as necessary conditions to achieve effective COVID-19 responses.**

Local and regional governments have been at the forefront of preventing the worst of the outbreak and providing healthcare to its citizens, which is why National level health emergency assessments, plans and strategies should place a greater emphasis on cities and regions, as this is where the greatest threats and opportunities are. Adequate representation and involvement of local governments and regional governments and communities should be secured in health policy development. This must focus on involving (not just engaging) communities, especially those at greatest risk, such as through participatory governance.

Throughout the outbreak, we have come to understand the importance of technology to protect and safeguard the functioning of services. Homeschooling, working-from-home, and telemedicine have become part of our daily lives. The role of all stakeholders now is to ensure that communities are the ones that lead technology by bridging the digital divide and ensuring all communities are able to shape how we use technology, and to protect our communities' digital rights, especially with regard to privacy, freedom of expression and democracy.

Cities and regions are centres of creativity and innovation. We need to acknowledge the role culture has played during the worst of the pandemic, as a fundamental tool to widen the freedoms of people, building a strong social fabric and bridging economic gaps to help address and achieve sustainable urban development.

As we enter the recovery, it is essential to support strong frameworks of basic services and, in particular, to ensure universal healthcare 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 around the world. We need to commit to refrain from export restrictions on vaccines and to releasing the patents, as inequitable access widens the gap between the Global North and South. And makes leaving no-one behind an impossibility.

It is key that cities find ways to support cultural activity, and protect cultural sectors and actors, and cultural creation and production, so that they can endure the crisis and resume their activities after the crisis. The tourist sector will need to be redefined by the communities and local and regional authorities, 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.

It is time to re-evaluate how to support systems of service provision to ensure their sustainability in the aftermath, to address the rising inequalities that the pandemic has exacerbated by understanding that protecting those most vulnerable and strengthening access and protection of health services, shaping digitalization, and protecting and fostering culture are the key to an equitable recovery. Essential services will need to be redefined as we work towards a “care” society where solidarity and active and informed citizenship is the beacon of safety for all.

The Local Authorities Major Group calls for:

- **The maintenance and sustainability of local public service provision to ensure that our communities are safeguarded**, which can only occur via strengthened decentralized cooperation and a renewed more inclusive multilateral system.
- Promote innovative governance models of public service provision adapted to the urban and metropolitan realities that includes both the infrastructural perspective but also its economic and social sustainability.
- **Strengthen health services and our ability to provide vaccinations to all** by strengthening the multi-stakeholder governance structure of the international systems to allow all spheres of government and actors to respond to emergencies.
- **The development agendas to be addressed as one and for their need to be reinforced by local service provision** driven by strong LRGs and associations close to the communities they serve and together with their peers across the globe through decentralized cooperation.
- **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 population and the **sustainability and resilience** of the environment at large.

Strengthening multilevel governance and capacities for LRGs

The constituency of Local and Regional Authorities 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 and inclusive recovery. We are also aware that no single sphere of government or actor can achieve the global agendas alone.

Local and regional governments want to contribute to shape a multilateral system that places a greater emphasis on the commons and role that public service provision needs to play in development to achieve the global goals. The transformative and mobilising potential that city-to-city and region-to-region cooperation plays in fostering awareness about shared goals and bolstering capacities at local level to achieve global goals should be acknowledged.

This year and towards the United Nations High-Level Meeting on the Review of Implementation of the New Urban Agenda, our constituency is demonstrating that the interconnection between the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is steadfast. The accelerating potential of the New Urban Agenda is critical for the 2030 Agenda’s implementation, rooted in local and regional priorities.

The New Urban Agenda is a critical element to territorialise our recovery. The necessity to expand

health, food and service systems beyond metropolitan areas is now a priority for most countries around the world. The symbiosis between the urban and the rural world will be defining future investment and policy the World round and it has also reached the agenda of the most powerful economies of the planet gathered under the G20 with a focus on intermediary cities.

We call for a renewed, inclusive HLPF **that institutionalizes dialogue with LRGs and stakeholders as a means to deliver a multilateral system based on ownership, co-creation, and partnership mechanisms including all actors in decision-making.** An equality-driven system that fully engages LRGs and their associations, able to deliver universal basic services and healthcare powered by a green and sustainable vision, using the most appropriated technologies available that contributes to the creation of an urban-rural continuum enriched through peer-to-peer cooperation and driven by accountable inclusive institutions at all levels. An effective localization requires a new multilateralism, with local democracy and localization 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 in the new normality.

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 governments to critical and adequate financial resources to fully realize the global agendas. **For this to be possible, territorial and fiscal decentralization and where needed, public administration reforms, must go hand-in-hand in developing mechanisms for local and regional governments to finance their own needs and aspirations.**

Localizing finance and investment must be a common ambition and efforts from all actors at all levels of government must be concentrated within renewed frameworks of dialogue, consultation and cooperation.

The Local Authorities Major Group calls for:

- **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.**
- **A strengthened multilateral governance system** prioritizing a whole of society approach and multi-stakeholder collaboration, and acknowledging the ecosystem of local and regional governments and their associations.
- **The strengthening of innovative and effective 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 during and in the aftermath of the outbreak and to ensure the full implementation of the universal development agendas.

Commitment to the localization of the universal development agendas and fostering VLRs and VSRs.

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.

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, LRG involvement in monitoring and reporting processes has evolved. In 2020, in 55% of countries, LRGs have been asked to contribute or been included in reporting consultations, and processes are increasingly participatory and multi-stakeholder, meaning that localization is gaining traction, albeit irregularly. If the SDGs are to be achieved, it is critical to ensure the involvement of LRGs in the VNR processes, and the availability of local, regional and gender-disaggregated data. These should be seen as policy revision opportunities in order to create more traction and ownership of the Goals.

We call for this process to gain strength across all regions by revising strategies to mobilize and involve LRGs and their associations in the VNR processes, and by **promoting the development of VLR and VSR** (country-wide, bottom-up subnational reporting processes on the state of localization of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a specific country) **as policy consolidation opportunities that are integral to foster ownership and achieve the goals**, promoted by Local Government Associations with inputs from all LRGs.

Fostering the development of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) is essential to stimulate bottom-up transformation to accelerate implementation of the SDGs. VLRs and VSRs are more than just a monitoring and evaluation tool: they embody the commitment of local and regional governments, and their associations, 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, with the support of LRGs associations, to avoid leaving local governance behind.
- **The full recognition of monitoring and reporting processes such as VLRs and VSRs in official HLPF deliberations.**

Conclusions

To ensure that all people are cared for equally, to deliver a sustainable recovery, we need an equality-driven multilateral system that fully engages LRGs and their associations, to deliver universal basic services and healthcare, driven by a green and sustainable vision. The universal development agendas, the framework for a sustainable world, remain relevant to transform our planet, but they will only happen through a strong enabling environment to local and regional governments.

The review of the New Urban Agenda, the commitment to the UN to renewed multilateralism, and the upcoming High-Level Political Forum are key milestones to co-create the next generation of multilateralism, with local democracy and territorial governance at its core, by co-creating policies with the involvement of our communities.

The structural shift that we are calling for requires a more inclusive, networked multilateral system. This system needs to include co-creation, and partnership mechanisms including all stakeholders and allow for allocation of responsibilities and competences for all spheres of government

We call for a system in which local and regional governments are fully engaged by holding a permanent seat at the decision-making tables representing the peoples they serve, and a strong international community and updated UN system that reflects the current context, including local and regional governments in all stages of decision-making processes

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 Subnational Reviews, with inputs from all LRGs in a territory.