

LOCAL AUTHORITIES MAJOR GROUP - LAMG

POSITION PAPER ON THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

Introduction

Local and Regional Authorities warmly welcomed the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, particularly the adoption of a specific goal on urbanization –Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (Goal 11). For us, the 2030 Agenda is an important milestone on the way to the Habitat III Conference and the adoption of the New Urban Agenda.

The achievement of the 2030 Agenda requires us to seek complementarities and interlinkages with other recently adopted international agendas, such as the Paris Climate Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Prevention and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. In a rapidly urbanizing world, the New Urban Agenda is also an opportunity to strengthen the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The capacity to develop inclusive partnerships based on the full involvement and collaboration of Major Groups and other stakeholders, in particular of the local and regional government constituency (LRGs), will also be critical to the success of the SDGs.

As stressed by the UN Secretary General in his Synthesis Report on the Post-2015 Agenda, *“many of the investments to achieve the sustainable development goals will take place at the subnational level and be led by local authorities”* (A/69/700, para 94).

Indeed, local and regional governments are at the forefront of tackling most of the issues addressed by the SDGs in our daily work. We have a fundamental role in ensuring the safety, security, livelihoods and wellbeing of our communities. However, in many cases, policy development at national, regional and global level does not sufficiently take into account how these policies affect sub-national levels where people live and experience global challenges. An effective review and follow-up of SDG implementation worldwide should take into consideration, not only the contributions of each country, but also the specific needs of different cities and regions, to avoid leaving anyone behind.

As a first stock-taking exercise assessment of what has been done so far by Members States and UN institutions, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) offers an opportunity for Major Groups and other stakeholders to contribute our experiences to “a coherent and efficient and inclusive follow-up and review system at the global level”. LRGs, as one of the Major Groups, are committed to contribute our experiences and initiatives from a sub-national perspective, mobilizing our constituency and strengthening a multi-stakeholder approach by engaging citizens in a bottom-up process for the implementation of the SDGs.

It is with this aim in mind that the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, in collaboration with UNDP and UN Habitat, have been working on the “localization” of the SDGs, following the global consultation on localization in 2014 by the UN system.

What does the localization of the SDGs mean?

Localizing refers to the implementation and monitoring of SDGs at local and regional level.

National strategies to implement the SDGs need to take in account the territories where the main global challenges should be tackled and results delivered. Vulnerable groups often live in specific areas where poverty is concentrated. Access to food, health, education, basic services like water and sanitation and energy should be delivered locally. Actions to ensure gender equality, create opportunities for decent jobs or innovation, promote responsible consumption and tackle climate change all need appropriate local policies that translate national strategies to local contexts.

In a majority of countries, LRGs have responsibilities relating to all of the SDGs, including subnational policy-making, governance and strategies to ensure implementation and delivery, monitoring and review. Elected subnational governments have the legitimacy to lead inclusive and participatory policy processes to ensure a people-centered approach to development. We are ideally placed to lead local multi-stakeholder partnerships in which public sector, civil society and business actors are involved according to their distinct competencies, capacities and resources. This is essential to create local ownership and mobilizes stakeholders to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

National, regional and local governments should play a leading role in facilitating this process. LRGs are also well-placed to bridge the gap between higher levels of governments and civil society groups and communities, fostering a strong involvement of civil society organizations, private companies (micro, small and medium enterprises), academia and other community based organizations.

The achievement of the 2030 Agenda depends on public policies implemented by LRGs. To localize the SDGs, it will be necessary to create and support appropriate conditions for implementation at the subnational level, strengthening subnational initiatives and capacities.

Localizing the SDGs – Implementation at subnational level

“Achieving the 2030 Agenda will require coherent systemic support, but most of the needed action on sustainable development is national, even local”¹

Subnational governments, if empowered with adequate capacities and resources, are well-positioned to harness local capacities, resources and potential to support sustainable, inclusive and sustained growth to contribute to national prosperity. Coherent and integrated national and subnational policies will be fundamental to support these processes; to build “inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities”, to reduce the increasing disparities between regions and urban areas, and take the important interaction among rural, urban and natural ecosystem areas into consideration.

Create an enabling environment for the implementation of the SDGs

¹ IISD policy brief Follow-Up and Review for the 2030 Agenda: Bringing coherence to the work of the HLPF.

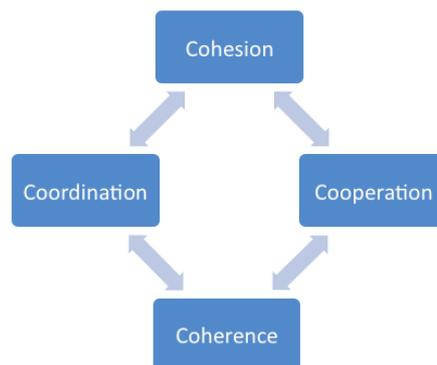
Considering the strategic position of LRGs, as the level of government closest to citizens and local stakeholders, and as intermediaries between national and local levels, it will be fundamental to create and develop the necessary enabling environment to allow us play our full role in the achievement of the SDGs on the ground. The 2030 Agenda will only be achieved at subnational level if appropriate institutional architecture and governance models are established to allow a multi-stakeholder and multi-level framework.

An effective multi-level governance framework should take into account the need for coherence, coordination, cooperation and cohesion of national and local policies. Ineffective multi-level governance can result in weak planning processes, backlogs in budget executions, higher transaction costs, economic inefficiencies and unilateral decision-making. (cf box)

National governments should play an important role to support the achievement of the SDGs at sub-national level and to support what LRGs and national associations of LRGs can do to align national and subnational priorities and strategies. LRGs are key partners of national governments in adapting the goals and targets at subnational levels and

Effective multilevel governance- The 4C Approach

The active engagement of LRGs should be based on the **4Cs approach** to ensure an effective and accountable systemic approach to achieve the SDGs and their targets. The 4Cs approach consists of:



- **COHERENCE** of policies across national sectoral policies. Across different themes and ministries, the ultimate goal for sustainable development should encompass coherent efforts, also keeping in mind the balance of the economic, environmental and social dimensions;
- **COHESION** of national and subnational plans and strategies, paying the necessary attention to specific needs of subnational regions, particularly those that lag behind, in order to ensure more integrated and balanced regional growth and social cohesion;
- **COORDINATION** between national and subnational level to align strategies and ensure the necessary support to action at the subnational level. Mechanisms for multi-level governance also need to be considered for coordination among regional and local governments;
- **COOPERATION** among all levels of government and with all stakeholders will be key to the success of the 2030 Agenda. Establishing partnerships and involving civil-society, business, academia and local communities should be at the heart of the implementation efforts of LRGs.

creating local ownership. LRGs should also provide a bottom-up link and contribute local priorities to national plans and strategies.

The following inspiring experiences of multilevel governance platforms linked to the SDGs are already in place and could be taken as examples: Comisión Interinstitucional de Alto Nivel para la Implementación de los ODS, Colombia; Council for Sustainable Development in Philippines.

National legislation and regulations provide the frameworks within which local and regional governments act. These should either create incentives or remove barriers for sustainable development action. This is especially critical with regard to promoting “transparent and accountable institutions” and “inclusive and participatory decision-making at all levels” (Goal 16). An enabling environment in many countries will require a clearer and more appropriate distribution of responsibilities and of resources between different levels of government, improved sub-national capacities for urban, land and territorial planning and basic services delivery, and development and transfer of knowledge and technology.

The achievement of the SDGs, both for the implementation and the follow-up, require a high degree of policy coherence, coordination and cooperation at and among all levels of government (national, regional and local). Effective multilevel-governance will be essential to create the indispensable synergies and complementarities required for the achievement of the SDGs:

Engaging and reporting at subnational level

The Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments is developing a roadmap of guiding principles and solutions to create an enabling environment for the effective implementation and monitoring of the SDGs at local and regional level. Some of the proposed actions are:

- 1. Raise-awareness and ownership at subnational levels:** LRG networks should promote campaigns for the “localization of the SDGs” to make SDGs better known and recognizable, and encourage their member local and regional governments to act on the 2030 Agenda. The achievement of the SDGs requires that all stakeholders and individuals understand and agree on their roles.

- 2. Enabling LRG participation in the development of national strategies and institutional frameworks to facilitate the localization of the SDGs:** National associations of local and regional governments have an important task in seeking to contribute to national strategies, building national consensus and calling for an enabling environment for the localization of the SDGs, including effective multilevel governance mechanisms.
- 3. Getting ready to start the implementation of the SDGs at subnational level:** Establish the necessary institutional and governance frameworks in local and regional governments and analyze existing local/regional plans or policy programmes to check their consistency and adequacy with the SDGs and their alignment with national goals and targets.
- 4. Engage with civil-society and multi-stakeholders:** Promote multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms at subnational level. Identify needs and shared priorities within communities and territories through a participatory process. This could be particularly helpful to identify vulnerable groups and address their needs.
- 5. Efficient and participatory implementation of flagship projects:** Leaving no one behind will require diversified actions to address specific necessities and circumstances of each territory, city and local community. LRGs can help assess gaps and priorities of areas within countries, adapting strategies and plans to ensure that the SDGs could be achieved by benefitting all.
- 6. Monitoring systems and indicators:** Many LRGs have existing institutions and practices for data collection and analysis. They also could contribute to innovative and multi-stakeholder data collection for multiplication of sources, transparency, disaggregated information and focus on specificities. Although much needs to be improved, especially in terms of harmonizing methodologies to enable comparability, disaggregated data at the subnational will be required to contribute to the national monitoring and reporting systems.
- 7. Best-practices and lessons learned:** Reporting at subnational level will allow the identification of good experiences, the challenges and barriers faced in the local implementation. The innovative solutions by “local or regional champions”

could then be of interest and even replicated by actors at the subnational level of other countries.

- 8. Follow-up, national and global reporting, evaluation and capitalization of experiences:** Subnational governments should contribute to the reporting and follow-up process at national and global level. Subnational levels should receive more attention in national reviews and reports mechanism. Greater visibility and specific reporting mechanisms dedicated to local and regional governments at national and global level would be a great incentive to many local and regional governments to be more deeply involved in the process.

The capacity of LRGs to cause policy to change on the ground should be taken into consideration in national reviews. LRGs are strategic partners in supporting balanced and inclusive territorial development at the national level, based on a strong system of cities that promote social cohesion and reduce inequalities between regions. To this end, and whenever possible, strategies and actions for implementation should be aligned and combined, in order to result in coherent and effective results in all countries. Local and regional governments can enrich exchanges at the national level by sharing our knowledge and innovative experiences.

In this regard, **LRGs and our associations are keen on contributing and engaging in national processes of follow-up and review of the SDGs. It will be particularly important to continue to advocate for national dialogues and inclusive opportunities for local government participation. National reviews should be open to reports and inputs produced at the subnational level, not only by LRGs, but also by grassroots local communities, NGOs, think tanks, academia, media and others. These contributions could be instrumental to harness subnational disaggregated data and ensure more bottom-up monitoring and evaluation processes.**

Cities and sustainable urbanization in the 2030 Agenda

The world has changed since the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals fifteen years ago. Around 54% the world's population now live in cities and urban settlements, and this percentage is expected to increase to 66% by 2050 (UNDESA, *World Urbanization Prospects* 2014). The transformation is particularly relevant for

Africa and Asia, where 90% of urban growth will be concentrated over the coming decades.

Sustainable urbanization is now recognized as a crucial issue for the achievement of the SDGs. Beyond the urban Goal 11, this massive urban transformation will determine the achievement of the majority of the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda (around 65% of targets and 157 indicators require urban policy responses).

Considering the important synergies of the SDGs with cities and territories, HLPF 2016 should be encouraged to produce a specific contribution for the upcoming Habitat III Conference.

The next UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, to take place in Quito, Ecuador, from 17-20 October 2016, will adopt the New Urban Agenda, which should contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. During the meeting, Member States, LRGs and all stakeholders should be able to contribute and reflect on concrete actions for the implementation of the SDGs in cities and territories.

LRGs are leading several discussions in the preparatory process towards Habitat III. Through contributions to different policy-units, regional and thematic conferences and global hearings, the fundamental importance of including Major Groups and other stakeholders, and particularly LRGs, which will have specific responsibilities for implementation, has been confirmed.

In this context, **the Local Authorities Major Group is involved in the aforementioned Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, a unique platform to mobilize and organize our constituency and make joint recommendations for Habitat III and to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.** Additionally, partners of the LAMG also work in different participatory initiatives, as the Communitas Coalition for Sustainable Cities and Regions, which brings together varied expert multi-stakeholders to prepare technical contributions on key topics of this agenda.

Contributions to the Global Reviews

The HLPF, as the main forum to support the review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda, could enable mutual learning across countries and regions through an inclusive

approach that includes Major Groups and other stakeholders, as called for by the UN Secretary General in his “critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level”. The Local Authorities Major Group is committed to contribute to the HLPF by reporting on the experiences of local and regional governments and our initiatives to support the national and global review of the SDGs.

In this context, the aim of the Local Authorities’ Major Group, organized within the Global Taskforce, is to promote in-depth voluntary reviews at subnational level to contribute to the global reporting process, and thus enable the benchmarking of different strategies used by LRGs worldwide. The challenges, conclusions and case studies could be compiled and presented to the HLPF as a joint and significant contribution to this process.

LRG networks and associations are also exploring the feasibility of convening, ahead of future HLPFs, **regular conferences on SDG implementation at the subnational level** to contribute to the Global Review process, with the support of the UN and interested Member States.

Based on these possible actions, the Local Authorities’ Major Group would like to **submit for consideration our willingness to organize a first conference on SDG implementation at subnational level to contribute to the review of the theme proposed by the UN Secretary General for HLPF 2018, “Making cities sustainable and building productive capacities” (UN SG Report A/70/684, para 99).**