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Statement submitted by United Cities and Local Governments, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

Building on the Rio+20 outcome document, in which participants recognized local and subnational authorities as key partners, local and regional government organizations gathered in a global task force for the post-2015 development agenda.

As the closest level of government to the populations, local and regional governments have key roles in bringing sustainable development issues to the knowledge of their citizens. They will also be key actors for health promotion as providers of basic services, working in close collaboration with national Governments to ensure access to safe sufficient water, sanitation, health care, primary education and emergency services.

Local and regional governments have long been advocating for culture to be recognized as the fourth pillar of sustainable development. The future we want, based on healthy, safe, tolerant and creative societies, cannot be achieved unless the cultural component of sustainability is explicit.

With strong culture and innovation, local and regional governments are key drivers to achieve the sustainable and inclusive growth necessary for the structural transformation of the economy. A culturally innovative and reliable approach can foster decent jobs and resilience, through energy-efficient buildings, the development of multimodal and alternative transportation, and by bringing the food supply back to or close to cities, in the form of urban agriculture.

Culture

Local governments have made great progress in developing culturally sound policies that will contribute to resilient and innovative societies. Hundreds of cities around the world have adopted Agenda 21 for culture, which builds on the relationship between local cultural policies and human rights, governance, sustainable development, participatory democracy and peace.

In 2010, the international associations of local governments agreed to advocate for culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, engaging local governments to explicitly include culture in the model of development, as well as ensuring the enjoyment of culture and its components by all inhabitants. This approach includes the protection of citizens' rights to freedom of expression and access to information and resources.

We believe sustainable development policies and goals will only be achieved if rooted in culture and sensitive to local contexts, for the following reasons:

- Culture boosts the economic dimension. It generates income and employment and has an impact on entrepreneurship, new technologies and tourism. Culture brings creativity and innovation to the economy
- Culture is linked to the social dimension. It provides tools to fight against poverty, facilitates the participation of citizens and ensures a sense of dignity of all while enhancing intercultural dialogue and equal rights and contributes to peaceful societies
- Culture embraces the environmental dimension, by raising individuals' awareness of their responsibility to protect the environment and act against climate change

- Key values for development, like creativity, heritage, knowledge and diversity, must shape culture as the fourth pillar of development. A holistic and integrated approach to development will only be achieved when these values are explicit and made operational

Successful sustainable development policies should build on culture as a driver and enabler of development and people-centred societies. Poverty is not just a question of material conditions and income, but also of lack of capabilities and opportunities, including in cultural terms.

Local governments believe that the new development agenda should include targets on culture with measurable indicators on creativity, heritage, knowledge and diversity. This should contribute to empowering people to lead the lives they have reason to value.

Innovation

City and municipal governments have implemented innovative plans and programmes linked to the targets of the Millennium Development Goals and are trying to tackle rising inequalities among their populations. For instance, city governments with a commitment to health often have programmes that promote access to affordable and good quality housing, opportunities for social cohesion and social support networks, access to job opportunities and access to high-quality educational, cultural, recreational, commercial, health and outdoor resources.

Many city governments around the world have implemented innovative forms of participatory democracy to address the inequalities in terms of expression and influence experienced by low-income groups, minorities and groups facing discrimination. This can be seen in participatory budgeting or planning, local assemblies or “dialogue days” between local elected officers and communities, quotas reserved to ensure the representation of women, traditional authorities or certain minorities and the use of social media and new technologies to encourage participation, as well as different kinds of referenda or consultations.

Many city governments now work with organizations or federations representing slum dwellers to directly address a range of inequalities that include housing tenure, infrastructure, services, rule of law and participation. All of these programmes directly or indirectly address one of the most profound aspects of inequality, namely, the discrimination faced by those living in slums or informal settlements in all of the aforementioned areas. Many city governments in Asia contribute to community development funds set up in their city by savings groups formed by residents of informal settlements to fund improvements in infrastructure and services.

The local governments that have been most successful at this are generally in nations where national and all levels of subnational governments work together and where metropolitan city and municipal governments have the responsibilities and capacities to address inequality. Indeed, in most high-income nations, almost every urban-dweller has access to schools, health care and emergency services, even if some groups may face poor quality in these. This is not often the case in most low- and middle-income nations.

Inclusive growth acknowledging environmental and social dimensions

Local and regional governments are engaged in local economic development, with a focus on pro-poor policies and decent job creation in green urban economies that promote sustainable consumption and production.

In today's urbanized world, and given current trends that will continue in the coming years, leading to almost 70 per cent of the world's populations living in cities, sustainable urbanization is a source of development. Cities that are well planned, well designed and well governed can generate economic growth and means of livelihood. Sustainable urbanization includes a territorial approach and cohesion, with special attention to climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and safe cities.

Cities also have a responsibility in terms of the protection and sustainable management of the environment, biodiversity and natural resources.

Given their responsibilities to provide basic services and to be accountable for the well-being of their populations, local governments have key roles in addressing issues of sustainable resource use, waste generation and management, eco-system service protection and minimizing greenhouse gas emissions.

Fostering access to knowledge, solidarity and cohesion

Local and regional governments have a key role in fostering knowledge, both within their populations and among themselves.

Local and regional governments, as levels of governments closest to the people, mobilize populations and foster solidarity and understanding on the global agenda by local communities.

Local governments also have a key role in promoting know-how exchange through decentralized cooperation. There have been a growing number of such projects and programmes in recent years, especially in South-South and triangular cooperation.

Decentralized cooperation is a strong tool for providing capacity-building and support to institutional development at the subnational level, and for strengthening State-building efforts in transitional societies. Decentralized cooperation is based on shared characteristics and experiences, which make the transfer of governance, ideas and best practices much easier and efficient.

National development framework and action plans should give local governments the capacity to develop and implement local development plans, in particular for the provision of public service, to ensure coherent and effective development cooperation.
