THE ROLE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES IN THE UN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA POST-2015:
Paving the way to Habitat III

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Context

Following the intensive discussions on what should enhance or replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and on a new Sustainable Development Agenda (defined in Rio+20), the international community is now defining the general development agenda for the coming decades, in the so-called Post-2015 process.

As this new agenda is very closely related to the work and daily responsibilities of local and regional authorities, UCLG is closely following the discussions and trying to influence the policy debates. Building on the lessons learned from the MDGs, all development actors are setting priorities and drawing a roadmap to follow. Local and Regional Authorities will need to be at the heart of this agenda if MDG and post-MDG goals and targets are to be met.

This paper has been produced as a first input for UCLG members to reflect on our joint position toward the Post-2015 Development Agenda. A task force, made up of a group of mayors and regional presidents supported by a group of experts and partners will be mandated by the World Council in Dakar to continue to develop and refine our position. This task force will gather the input of local and regional authorities and add to this first input, developing additional contributions covering such issues as: Sustainable Urban Development, Human Rights – with a special focus on the right to the city, the role of women, youth among other issues.

We invite you to participate in this process of joint reflection.

The role of Local and Regional Authorities in the UN Development Agenda Post-2015

Wherever living standards are high, local and regional governments have played, and continue to play, a major role in their achievement – often the primary role. This can be seen in the wide range of responsibilities they have for infrastructure and services. They also generally have key roles in ensuring health and safety in buildings and enterprises, in disaster prevention and preparedness and, more generally, in promoting local development and more inclusive societies, engaging with citizens and civil society.

The importance of local and regional governments for development in low- and middle-income nations is recognized. Indeed, this is emphasized in the MDGs-5 Summit, in Rio+20 Summit, the 2011 Busan Declaration and the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on Post-2015 Agenda. But the pivotal involvement of local and regional governments in implementing and 'localizing' the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and sustainable development goals is rarely acted on by national governments and international agencies.

The need for a more coherent approach at national and sub-national levels

Those who are discussing and determining the post-2015 agenda tend to be at a vast distance from local realities. When they talk about "localizing" the MDGs, they mean at national level, not within local and regional jurisdictions. When they discuss good governance, they refer to the activities of national governments, not the vital relationships between citizens and their local administrations. When they measure progress, they use nationally representative datasets, relying on aggregate data to demonstrate success, but failing to reveal who is being left out and where they live. Moving forward, a much sharper focus is needed on the roles and responsibilities of sub-national governments and on the support they need to fulfil their critical responsibilities.

Most of the MDGs depend directly or indirectly on the provision of infrastructure and services – for, for instance, health, education, water, sanitation, emergency services, waste management, environment protection or gender equality. And most infrastructure and services depend to a greater or lesser degree on local and regional governments doing their job. All development interventions are local in the sense that they depend on local institutions – utility companies, solid-waste collection services, schools, day-care centres, health-care clinics, public transport systems, police stations, risk prevention, policies to reduce energy consumption and green house gas emissions, support to medium and small enterprises…. Reaching the most disadvantaged requires local institutions and action. Even where interventions are the responsibility of national ministries, or infrastructure or services delivered through private enterprises or international NGOs, their effectiveness usually depends on local and regional government support, coordination and oversight.

In its discussion of concerns and problems with the MDG framework, the UN Task Team does not specifically point to the role of local government as having been overlooked. However, most of the weaknesses it describes relate very specifically to local government, its relevance to this process, and the absence of attention to its role.

Bridging the gap between national and local levels

The MDGs are most likely to be met where local and regional governments have the competence and capacity to fulfill their responsibilities, and where their residents are able to make demands for accountability and transparency, especially those residents whose MDG needs are not yet realized. Many local and regional governments have been pioneers and implementers of inclusive development innovations including participatory budgeting and co-production with urban poor organizations and federations. Where substantive progress is being made on most of the MDGs, it is more likely to be because local and regional governments are doing their job than because of specially designed national campaigns or policies.

But in low-income and most middle-income nations the roles and responsibilities assigned to local and regional governments are usually far beyond their capacities, as many decentralization processes implemented in recent periods in different countries are incomplete or poorly defined. This helps explain the failure in many nations to meet many of the MDGs. Getting the best out of local and regional governments is fundamental not only to the MDGs but also to most of the goals and targets being discussed for post 2015. Local and regional government is specifically mentioned in two of the 20 thematic think pieces prepared by the UN Task Force, and other stakeholders, for considering the post 2015 process. A deeper understanding of the role of local and regional authorities is needed within the UN system, the official aid agencies and development banks to recognize, and thus be in a position to support the contributions of local governments. The MDGs may be clear about what they want to achieve but they say very little about **who needs to act** to meet the goals and targets and **how they get resourced and supported** to do so. Post MDG goals and targets need to pay far more attention to this.

Urbanization of poverty — a core challenge for the new development agenda

The lack of attention to local and regional government is also mirrored by the lack of attention to urban development. Improving the future of more than half of humanity, requires good local and regional governance. Many of the MDG targets and indicators are designed for rural contexts and so under-report the scale of deprivation in urban areas — for instance in regard to poverty (the US$1.25 a day poverty line is unrealistically low for many urban areas) and to the criteria used to define 'improved' provision for water and sanitation. For many low-income nations, the proportion of the urban population with water and sanitation has declined since 1990.

It is widely assumed that the most intransigent poverty is in rural areas, since urban averages point on the whole to healthier, better educated, less poor populations. There is strong evidence, however, that poverty, hunger, disease, a lack of schooling, together with violence are increasing in many urban areas. As urban populations grow, there are growing backlogs in basic provision, growing inequalities, growing social problems and growing vulnerability to disasters. The achievement of the MDGs may well become most difficult in urban areas where the disrespect for the basic needs and rights for one billon slum dwellers generates insecurity and uncertainty in the future.[1]

Part of the failure to address urban realities has been related to the more general lack of attention to population dynamics. The only target in the MDGs that makes specific reference to the urban situation is the significant improvement sought in the lives of at least 100

million slum dwellers (by 2020). Apparently, this has been met; UN Habitat reported that more than 200 million 'slum' dwellers moved out of slum conditions from 2000 to 2010 largely due to slum upgrading[2] but this apparent success may be largely the result of changes in the criteria for defining 'slums'.

Even if the target of significant improvements in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers has been exceeded, it fails to offset the growth in the target population. The significant growth in the number of poor urban dwellers has been identified as an obstacle in the way of MDG achievement, and it is one that will continue to block progress if it is not assertively addressed. This is especially significant for local and regional governments because of their substantially greater role and power in the urban areas of many countries. The growing burdens that urban local authorities face are hugely challenging, yet the resources available to them to tackle these challenges remain limited. When the major urban donors met in 2006, almost all of their representatives said that investment in urban development was a shrinking proportion of their agency's budget because of competing claims from such politically important issues as climate change and food aid.[3]

Moving Post-2015 development agenda toward more ownership and accountability

Post-2015 process success can only be guaranteed if it develops a sense of ownership and accountability at all levels, international, national and also sub-national. To contribute to this end, three primary concerns can be highlighted within all facets and levels of post 2015 preparations:

- The explicit recognition of local and regional authorities as critical agents in the achievement of most of the MDGs and SDGs,
- Attention to local and regional governments' capacity to deliver on their mandated responsibilities,
- Attention to the capacity of local citizens and civil society to hold their local governments accountable.

i) *Recognizing the role of local governance:* This means explicitly conceptualizing "ownership" and "localization" as bottom-up processes that pertain to citizens, the administrative bodies closest to them and other stakeholders in local provision. It means recognizing that:

- Planning, monitoring and support to local and regional governments is critical if the post 2015 agenda wants to give greater attention to growing inequalities than has been the case to date.
- Reinforcing participatory processes at local level is necessary for translating and adapting a global agenda and its national implications to local settings. The UN Task Team governance report acknowledges that this is needed to make Post-2015 Agenda most effectively.[4]

ii) *Attention to the capacity of local and regional governments:* Achieving the MDGs (or related goals) means that local governments have to be equipped to do their job. Analyses of decentralization and local governance point repeatedly to the gap between responsibilities and the fiscal and technical capacities to tackle them.[5] Local politicians and civil servants can often do very little to address large deficiencies in infrastructure and service provision because they lack the power, funding and revenue-raising capacity.

There is no single blueprint for improving the effectiveness of local and regional governments, but:

- Clearly attention needs to be directed towards the funding framework under which local governments operate – both through fiscal decentralization and national devolution of resources to better match the decentralization of tasks, and improved mechanisms geared towards local level support by international agencies.
- Strong efforts need to be made to improve human resources, technical capacity and management and strengthen the capacity to involve citizens in planning and decision making, with special attention to the most excluded
- Specific support to associations of local government to support the more systematic development of policies such as effective cooperation and exchange on technical and management capacities.

iii) *Social accountability:* Over the last decade there has been increasing interest on the part of international agencies in the assertion that service provision will improve if the providers are more accountable to their "clients".[6] The failure of government to provide this in efficient, equitable, transparent ways is linked to the limited voice of citizens to hold their governments accountable. This is why:

- Poor groups need mechanisms and channels other than voting through which to hold politicians and civil servants to account. Collective organizations are often the most effective means for increasing their influence.
- The partnership between local governments and civil society organizations has to be reinforced to go beyond service provision to the fundamental structural problems of development, in order to overcome important structural constraints on the ability of the poor to exercise their voice.[7]
- The interest of the international development world in social accountability should be accompanied by greater attention to ways of supporting this partnership within the post-2015 development priorities.

Going further to end with poverty and setting new objectives

There is a need to rethink existing goals and targets to include the (national and local) governance capacity to ensure the end of poverty is linked with a more sustainable future. Goals can be universal but many targets and most indicators need to recognize differences between national and sub-national contexts, and rural and urban realities.

Below are a set of thinking points intended as first inputs towards building concrete recommendations on the part of local and regional governments for areas to be tackled by the Post-2015 development agenda:

- ***Reduce inequalities, build inclusive cities and territories, minimise risk:***

The reduction of inequalities needs increased effort towards a more inclusive provision of basic services. This will involve a closer collaboration between national and local levels and major investments in infrastructure to ensure access for: 1) safe sufficient water, 2) sanitation, 3) health care, 4) primary education and 5) emergency services.

Not to leave anyone by the wayside, specific indicators for urban areas will be necessary to take into account their distinct context and internal disparities, and in particular: ensuring

ongoing improvement in the lives of slum dwellers, through access to the basic services mentioned above, secure tenure, decent work, and safe communities.

The goals should also include objectives to build more resilient cities and territories, to reduce disaster risks and the impacts of climate change.

In addition to infrastructure, one of the main priorities should be to assure food security for all.

- ***Include new objectives on governance and targets for sub-national governments***

Governance frameworks, including intergovernmental coordination and harmonisation, should be strengthened.

Local and regional development planning should be supported by national development strategies, and include specific targets for addressing inequalities, as well as concrete actions to reduce identified disaster risks and to assure climate change adaptation. In urban areas, a special focus on low-income groups to ensure they can find or build accommodation without increasing slum populations would be important. More attention needs to be paid to the roles and responsibilities of local governments in addressing MDG and post-MDG goals and targets and in monitoring systems that monitor this within each locality.

Strengthening local and regional government capacities to ensure they are able to work with their populations and civil society organisations to meet the above challenges, and implement local development plans will be essential.

Mechanisms and funding to support local and regional governments to commit to relevant goals and targets will also be essential to ensure concrete actions are taken at the local level. These will necessarily lead to a broader discussion on international financial institutions that can support governments (at all levels) that have the responsibility of addressing citizen needs and managing local development.

- ***Monitoring and Indicators***

Reforms to official data collection services will be necessary so that these may serve sub-national governments (for instance with data identifying where needs are concentrated within each local jurisdiction) and are able to monitor progress within local and regional governments.

With regard to the development goals themselves it will be important to determine a variety of indicators, which distinguish between the very different context of territories, reflecting both rural and urban communities. It may be necessary to set different base lines, and benchmarks for progress to ensure a more accurate reflection of the wellbeing of populations and to provide a more detailed sub-national picture of progress.

- ***Building a new Global Partnership***

Under the lead of UN System, identification, coordination and enabling of a wide spectrum of actors (international agencies and national governments, but also local and regional governments, CSOs, and community based groups), at different levels will be essential in ensuring progress to attaining the post 2015 development goals.

The success of alternative development strategies depends on a fundamental revision of this global partnership and the institutional and financial framework that should underpin the goals and targets. The new framework should be supported by a stronger and more democratic international governance structure that includes new stakeholders and covers issues and regulations not being addressed at present.

NEXT STEPS
Calendar towards Post-2015 Development Agenda and Habitat III

June 2012 – May 2013	Country and Global Thematic consultations
December 4- 6, 2012	UCLG World Council & Africities – Dakar, Senegal Constitution of the UCLG Post-2015 Task Force
January 20, 2013 (tbc)	3rd meeting of the Post-2015 High level Panel - Monrovia, Liberia
February - March, 2013 (tbc)	2nd meeting of the Task Force for the Post-2015 Development Position of Local and Regional Governments - New York, USA (tbc)
March, 2013	4th Meeting of the Post-2015 High level Panel – Indonesia
May 13-17, 2013 (tbc)	UCLG Executive Bureau – Lyon, France 3rd of the Task Force for the Post-2015 Development Position of Local and Regional Governments
May 31, 2013	HLP report to the Secretary-General – New York, USA
September 2013	Millennium Development Goals Summit Review
1-4 October 2013	**2013 World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders - 4th UCLG World Congress - Rabat, Morocco** "Imagine Society, Build Democracy" Organized by UCLG and Hosted by the City of Rabat, the Moroccan Government
Second Semester 2014	VII World Urban Forum (Medellin, Colombia)
September 2015	**UN Millennium Goals High-level Summit**
2016	**Habitat III Summit – 2nd Global Assembly of Local and Regional Governments**

[1] Urban Management Programme (2004) *Urban Millennium Partnership: Localizing MDGs*, UMP, UN Habitat

[2] UN-Habitat (2010), *State of the World's Cities 2010/11: Cities for All: Bridging the Urban Divide*, Earthscan Publications, London, 240 pages.

[3] Stren, Richard (2012) *Donor Assistance and Urban Service Delivery in Africa,* Working Paper No. 2012/49, UNU-WIDER

[4] UNDESA, UNDP, UNESCO (2012) Governance and development: Thematic think piece, UN System Task Force on the post 2015 UN Development Agenda, page 3

[5] UCLG (2008), 1st Global Report on Decentralization and Local Democracy, The World Bank, Washington DC; UCLG (2011); 2nd Global Report on Decentralization and Local Democracy, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, Cheltenham (UK) & Northampton (USA), ; Shah, Anwar (ed) (2006) *Local Governance in Developing Countries,* Public Sector Governance and Accountability Series, The World Bank, Washington DC; Development Partners Working Group on Decentralization and Local Governance –DeLoG (2011), Busan and Beyond: Localizing Paris Principles for More Effective Support to Decentralization and Local Government Reforms, DeLoG Secretariat, Bonn,; Stren 2012

[6] See for instance *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People,* The World Bank and Oxford University Press, Washington D.C.; UNDP (2010), *Fostering Social Accountability: From Principle to Practice*, Guidance Note, United Nations Development Programme, Democratic Governance Group

[7] Satterthwaite, David, Sheela Patel and Diana Mitlin (2011), *Engaging with the urban poor and their organizations for poverty reduction and urban governance*, An issues paper for the United Nations Development Programme.