Live Learning Experience: *Beyond the immediate response to the outbreak of COVID-19*

Building the Community

Briefing & Learning Note: The launch of the
Live Learning Experience
March 25th, 2020

For more information,
please contact:
policy@uclg.org

Introduction:

With over 2.500 million people in confinement all over the world, our worldwide governance structure is suffering unprecedented challenges. In an urban world, the local and territorial management models are being put to the test. With no predetermined manual or blueprint for this, the networks of local and regional governments and its partners come together to foster collective learning and solidarity.

One-hundred participants from all continents gathered from their homes in the first session of the Live Learning Experience (LLE) on Wednesday, March 25th, 2020. This was only the first of a series convened by UCLG, Metropolis, and UN-Habitat that will have weekly appointments throughout the month of April, as local and regional governments around the world confront the COVID-19 crisis.

The session was chaired by the UCLG Secretary General, **Emilia Saiz** and the Under Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN-Habitat, **Maimunah Sharif**.
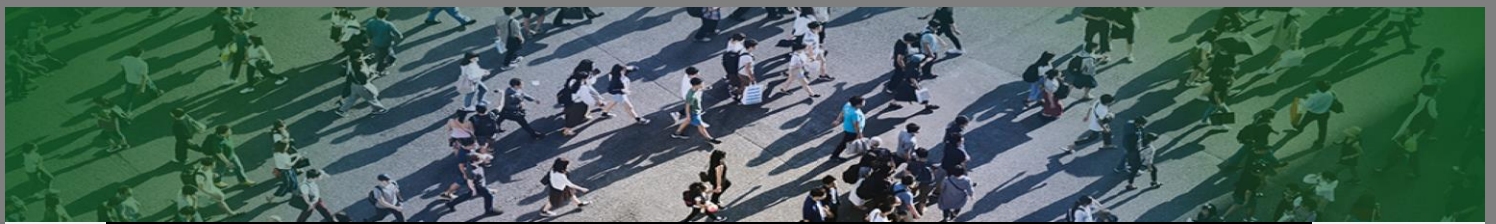
"Together, committed to local action and listening to local and regional governments, we can discover the solutions we need. One of the areas is how we tackle the people in most vulnerable places, informal settlements, and slums" **Maimunah Sharif**, Executive Director of UN-Habitat

The session counted with contributions from representatives of 10 cities, in addition to key partners. Participants included the Mayor of Al-Hoceima and UCLG President **Mohamed Boudra**, Deputy Mayors from Barcelona, Rome and Madrid, representatives from Guangzhou, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Xi'an, Durban, Lampedusa, as well as partners such as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, the President of Habitat International Coalition, and the Secretary General of UITP.

1. Identifying challenges and priorities

The session started with an interactive exercise sharing priorities. The consultation showed that while healthcare systems and infrastructure remain the top priorities, the provision of other public services is critical to maintain the health ecosystem going. Participants expressed their concerns in relation to the protection of the most vulnerable and, in particular, the elderly, who are among the most affected in

this health crisis.

Beyond Healthcare, which was considered the most important service, Access to housing and Social Services, Waste Management, and Education were the three most prioritized basic services by the participants of the Live Learning Experience.

2.   The frontline of the crises

Throughout the session, 10 representatives from a diverse set of cities from different continents and at different stages of the crisis shared their challenges and some of the mechanisms they are using to confront them. City leaders and officials are focused on guaranteeing the continued provision of all public services and taking care of the public servants in charge of delivering those services, but they are also already thinking of the aftermath of this situation. In particular, the impact it will have on the local economy and the transition from support measures to a long-term recovery strategy was pointed as being key going forward.

City, Representative	Main policy responses	Challenges
Guangzhou **Dr. Tang Xiaoping,** Director Health Guangzhou	Strengthened coordination of the health response at all levels by authorities and society-wide efforts have proven essential to prevent and control the pandemic.	Containment measures are important, early detection, early reporting, early isolation, centralized patient treatment, strong coordination.
Bogotá **Luz Maria Minda,** Director of International Relations	In the preparation phase, the increase of health units and medical supply provisions, and providing support to the most vulnerable groups has been a priority. Pedagogical efforts have been made to reach all. In regards to policy decision making, a holistic approach that puts human care at the center is being favored.	The main challenge at the moment is to flatten the curve of infections to avoid a break-down of the health system and to protect the most vulnerable groups.
Buenos Aires **Francisco Resnicoff,** Under Secretary General of International Relations	The city aims to use social media and technology to manage the COVID-19 emergency. For example, via the establishment of a WhatsApp channel that is connected to the emergency medical care system.	The main challenges are to contain the virus outbreak, to prepare the medical system so it can deal with the emergency, and to prepare structured policies for the post-crisis period. High degree of informality, also in local public services.
Montevideo **Nelson Fernández**, Director of international relations	Securing the national food supply chain through the maintenance of food distribution via the central market that provides 70% of all food related products.	The maintenance of basic public services while reducing the rate of infection.
Madrid **Begoña Villacís,** Deputy Mayor	Provision of additional hospital capacity through temporary field hospitals and special attention to the needs of the homeless population during the COVID-19 emergency. In addition to that, a municipal tax-cut was undertaken to help affected companies.	The provision of sufficient medical products together with ensuring that the impacts on social and economic life are as minimal as possible.

Xian **Qi Shi**, Director External Affairs	Delay of the infection rate to slow-down the spread of the virus in the whole country through strict quarantine and testing of patients and medical staff.	The main challenge was to raise sufficient awareness among citizens regarding the strong measures and the hard impacts on the local economy.
Rome **Luca Bergamo**, Deputy Mayor, Rome	Addressing the strong reliance of the city on tourism and consumption. Rebalancing the relation between private and public priorities.	The shortages of medical supplies and the social and economic consequences of quarantine and lock-down.
Barcelona **Laia Bonet**, Deputy Mayor	Mortgage and rental moratorium, a halt of evictions, adequate hotels and Airbnb's as medical care facilities and shelter, maintaining public contracting, developing digital tools for social cohesion services. All public service remains functional.	Transport use has fallen to 10%, liquidity of population in particular autonomous and SMD, lack of sanitation and medical material procurement channels.
Durban **Puvendra Akkiah**, Head of ID Planning	Closure of all public institutions and usage of new communication technologies to enable the functioning of public services.	Informal settlements present a major challenge, the impact on the economy for private entities and the local authorities in the current recession.
Lampedusa **Antonello Ravetto**, Mayor's Cabinet, Lampedusa	Communication and information to calm the population works well, quarantines in refugee centers in the harbour, new migrant boats are re-directed to other ports in Italy, confinement of population at home.	The small island of Lampedusa is a destination for refugees and migrants, but only has 1 medical center and no hospital.

3.   Shared vision

The rich presentations of the different experiences and reflections of partner organizations all emphasized the following coming key axes to successfully address the challenge.

1.   Fostering a sense of community and solidarity

2.   Focus on the most vulnerable

3.   Local Public Service provision as a key instrument

4.   Science, culture, and technology as critical tools during and post-crisis

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

●   *TRANSPARENCY AND AWARENESS*: clarity, information and exercising proximity governance is critical. Neighbours need information and need to feel part of the city.

●   *SOCIAL TIGHTNESS BUT PHYSICAL DISTANCING*: Cities around the world are working hard to ensure that populations understand confinement only as physical distancing but encouraging solidarity, empathy and a caring spirit;

LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES ARE KEY

●   *HEALTH SERVICES NEED TO BE SUPPORTED BY OTHER SERVICES*: Public Health response is the top priority **but** it cannot succeed on our own. The capacity to deliver other public services that ensure mobility, access, food security, the rule of law, the use of public space and public facilities and many more are critical to a successful sanitary approach.

●   *COST RECOVERY OF PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION WILL BE CRITICAL*: Services, such as mobility, remain functional, although below cost recovery, and it is essential to strengthen this provision in the aftermath of the outbreak. Administration also remains functional, as many municipal staffers work from home. It will be important to guarantee the sustainability of the public service ecosystem.

●   *MUNICIPAL MARKETS* are the backbone of food security and provision in cities around the world. It will be critical to enhance this infrastructure in the future.

●   *PUBLIC PROCUREMENT* is challenging in times of crisis. Competition is high and regulations are complex. A new governance around this procurement will be critical.

TAKING CARE OF THOSE THAT NEED IT MOST

● *SCHOOLS AND CARE CENTRES* do not only play a role in education. Cities all over the world are ensuring that in the face of closed education centers children still have access to meals every day.

● *NOT EVERYBODY HAS A HOME* and *NOT ALL HOMES ARE ADEQUATE* - Migrants, informal dwellers, homeless - the provision of shelter has become a critical role of local governments in this crisis. City authorities realize this will impact in the future housing policies. Policy measures around rent and mortgage support but also providing alternative housing are put in place. Are these measures of no return in the aftermath?

● *INCENTIVES, MAINTAINING CONTRACTS WITH SUPPLIERS AND AVOIDING JOB LOSSES IS AT THE HEART OF THE MEASURES* - Economic downturn is a challenge on the horizon, which increases with confinement measures. Recession will hit urban economies and clusters, but especially cities already in contexts of economic downturn. Aware of these scenarios, local administrations intend to continue contracts with the private sector, in planning, and seek to engage social labor whenever possible;

SCIENCE, CULTURE, AND TECHNOLOGY CRITICAL TOOLS FOR GOVERNANCE

● *WE WILL NEED TO REINVENT THE RELATION WITH SCIENCE*; our governance systems are not fit to take on board all the knowledge by the different parts of the scientific communities.

● *CULTURE HAS TAKEN A TOLL IN THIS ENVIRONMENT* - It has been one of the first sectors to take a hit, and it affects many workers that are work in daily fees. There is a need to reinvent how culture is accessed, in order to ensure it survives and that it can help with social reconstruction after the outbreak.

● *TECHNOLOGY NEEDS TO PLAY A BIGGER PART* in the future service provision. They need to be based on human platforms and community-based services and outreach. Information sharing, pedagogical approaches, and community involvement are critical.

● *INTERNET AS A RIGHT AND EQUALISER IS CRITICAL* - Broadband internet service is critical during this shift of working and studying from home - and it is crucial that communities listen to more experiences.

THE OPPORTUNITY

COORDINATION AMONG DIFFERENT SPHERES OF GOVERNMENT WORKS

Whatever measures work in this crisis will necessitate close collaboration and coordination. It might not be perfect but it is critical. Emergency governance, however, has the disadvantage that local knowledge, capacities, and realities might be overlooked.

In each crisis there is also an opportunity – We need to think about how the city will look like in the future. All participants expressed what they sensed as a point of no return that will demand revising many of our systems.

COVID-19 is changing the world, but also highlighting that humankind is one community, with a shared future. The role of solidarity, working together, and the contributions of local and regional governments to sustainable development and responding to crises will be essential to develop the sustainable and resilient communities of the future.

There was a shared hope that the protection of commons, enhanced financing and resourcing of public service provision and protection of public service will be at the core of future models.

Collective learning through the **Cities for Global Health platform** set-up by Metropolis and the **Live Learning Experiences** facilitated by UCLG, Metropolis, and UN-Habitat will continue… follow us #BeyondtheOutbreak