

#Listen2Cities
#HLPF2022



JOINT STATEMENT TO THE 2022 HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

of the organized constituency of local
and regional governments





In the midst of the interconnected crises that the world is facing today, local and regional governments and their representative associations have been and still are at the forefront of efforts to overcome these difficult times as providers and protectors of their communities and of the planet.

Local and regional governments have been working to protect their communities even in these complex contexts, working to safeguard those most vulnerable and ensuring their safety by sanitizing transport, ensuring the provision of food, and working to halt evictions as well as safeguarding the health and human rights of people. Local and regional governments have worked to protect women from situations of violence in the pandemic delivering gender-based responses and by fostering systems of care. Moreover, city diplomacy has worked to ensure that solidarity and the providing of essential services to those who need them most continue during the worst of times.

To truly ensure that no one and no place is left behind and that we achieve the SDGs, a more networked multilateral system based on multilevel governance, and multi-stakeholder collaboration is needed. This renewed 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 needs to deliver financial support and capacity development for local and regional governments (LRGs) to participate in this transformation. A whole of government and whole of society approach is also essential to address inequalities, climate change, and to foster peace to transform our systems.



LOCALIZATION IN 2022: THE SDGs IN REVIEW THIS YEAR

Strengthening local public service provision to ensure the right to education and a better shared future

The impact of the pandemic among those who already had less opportunities is tangible. Older persons, workers and persons living in informality, women, children, and persons with disabilities and older persons have been among the hardest hit. The current crises in Ukraine, Mali, or Lebanon are also hitting marginalized populations the most, causing displacement and refugees, as well as the tragic loss of lives

The role of local and regional governments as hubs of learning and innovation is critical to ensuring quality education and providing accessible, safe and supporting environments to all which foster equality and equal opportunities, and which will allow us to be more resilient to future crises. Education is a fundamental human right for unlocking the full development of individuals and communities at all stages of life. Indeed, investing in educational attainment is key to overcoming inequalities. This involves fostering formal education, including free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, combatting early school dropout and incentivizing return; enriching school curriculums; promoting healthy and safe learning environments, early childhood development, and equitable participation in post-secondary education, including university. It also includes promoting technical and vocational skills, employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship, both through TVET and higher education, as well as informal and non-formal forms of providing education, particularly to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Local and regional governments have a privileged position to foster educational policies and to create enabling environments for exchange and learning to empower their communities. Participatory policy-making is crucial in order to ensure that lifelong educational programmes meet the needs and priorities of all citizens.

The recovery of the learning crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has wiped out 20 years of learning gains, will only occur if extraordinary efforts are made. It is estimated that 11 million girls will not return to school due to COVID-19 school closures. For this reason, a bottom-up, proximity and community-based education approach that goes beyond the boundaries of traditional schooling is critical. This includes addressing the digital divide through public services, engaging families in educational policies of their children, fostering gender-responsive education and overcoming barriers to women and girls in education and, all in all, providing adaptation measures for populations that face structural discrimination.

The provision of adequate education requires responding to a number of fundamental needs that include access to water and sanitation (SDG 6), health (SDG 3), food (SDG 2), transport, housing and other types of infrastructure, especially in cities (SDG 11).

Addressing the interconnected crises through gender equality and feminist policy making

The gendered effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are well-known and far-reaching, disproportionately impacting women, girls, transgender and non-binary people, especially visible minorities and racialized people, those with different accessibility needs, those of migrant background, older women, and other marginalised groups. And many stem from the same cause: the persistent association between care work and women's work, coupled with the devaluing of this work both in the home and in society.

Challenges related to violence against women have also been significantly increased in the last years, causing serious consequences and potential mid to long-term impacts on health and well-being, affecting the whole of society. Civil society movements and local governments raised special awareness on the growing prevalence of femicides.

Fostering gender equality and the participation of women and local feminist leaders in decision-making is core to the democratic process, and key to enabling governance with care and empathy, and responding to the diverse needs and aspirations of communities. Feminist local politics, which promotes solidarity and partnership over competition, can contribute to creating spaces for people and the planet to be nurtured and respected and can ensure all citizens' rights be met through enabling environments which are sensitive to gender and account for a diversity of needs. Local and regional governments and their active role and growing engagement in promoting public policies to address violence against women is essential for an enabling environment for women development and empowerment and for feminist politics.

Feminist local leadership is about placing our communities at the centre, emphasising governance of proximity, peaceful collaboration, and delivering services in a way that cares for those who provide them.

Achieving better life on land, below water, and in all cities and territories

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the intrinsic connections between people and nature and how climate change threatens livelihoods and biodiversity. **Achieving better and sustainable life on land and below water will only be possible through SDG localization processes that consider the role of big and intermediary cities, small towns, and regions and territories**, which are essential to resilience and to foster alternative models of production and consumption. Sustainable territorial development requires strategies that approach the territory as a multifunctional and connected system. Local and regional governments are essential to embody a vision for a better life on land as the closest level of government to communities and as the protectors of the biodiversity of their territories.

To replace our current extractive paradigm by a regenerative future, unsustainable resource use, population growth, inequality and the flawed economic system that have caused ecosystems decline must be systematically addressed. **All climate**

action must be supported and reinforced by a change in our relationship with our ecosystems through a structural change in economic models and production-consumption systems. A shift towards caring systems, through culture as a lever for sustainable development; as well as the protection of environmental rights and eliminating all forms of injustices with regard to access to a quality and healthy environment are critical contributions from a local and regional perspective.

Moreover, protecting our oceans and fostering life below water will not be possible without the strong inclusion and involvement of all local and regional governments even beyond coastal areas, fostering biodiversity protection, the management of watershed and reducing coastal and marine pollution. An increasing number of local and regional governments are engaged in maritime spatial planning and in the management all coastal and maritime activities and the blue economy. In short, protecting our oceans cannot be achieved without multilevel and multistakeholder ocean governance involving all government levels and actors through vertical and horizontal coordination and cooperation.

Combining scientific monitoring, civil society inclusion and traditional knowledge is critical for ecosystem restoration. Local and regional governments can engage multiple levels of government and stakeholders across sectors in a coordinated manner, facilitating cooperation, trust and mutual learning, as well as greater inclusivity and justice.

Commitment to the localization of the universal development agendas and fostering Voluntary Local Reviews and Voluntary Subnational Reviews

Local and regional governments and their networks are committed to the localization of the universal development agendas and to leaving no one and no place behind. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, LRG involvement in monitoring and reporting processes has evolved.

Over 2020 and 2021, the total number of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) available worldwide has more than tripled (from approximately 40 VLRs in June 2020 to more than 150 in June 2022). In the same period of time, 15 Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) (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) have emerged in 14 countries worldwide. Ten more are going to be published in July 2022. These VLRs and VSRs -representing now a total of 1.2 billion people- have proved to influence national dialogues and mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs, and have also had direct positive impacts in local governance by increasing awareness, transparency, accountability and ownership of the Global Goals by local and regional governments and their associations. Key results include better vision of localization processes, more attention from national governments and sometimes even better coordination with the involvement of local government associations in national mechanisms. Such reporting processes also strengthen the dialogue between local governments and international institutions.

Participation, however, remains unequal: LRG participation in the preparation of VNRs increased gradually from 32% of countries in 2016 to 48% in 2022 while LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms to steer SDG implementation made slower progress. The participation was 28% on average between 2016-2021 and reached 34% in 2022, although with strong regional contrasts. In Europe the participation reached 88% in VNR processes and 63% in national coordination mechanisms in 2022 but declines this year in Asia-Pacific and in Latin America were felt.

VLRs and VSRs should be seen as policy tools in order to create more traction and ownership of the Goals on top of their use in reporting. Local and regional governments and their associations reiterate their commitment to fostering the development of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSR). The synergies that arise from the combination of these reports and processes are invaluable in promoting ownership and the achievement of the SDGs and increase local and regional government participation in national coordination mechanisms.



OUR HOPES FOR THE 2022 HLPF

Local and regional governments are bringing to light the new essentials for a world that cares. The time has come to develop an enabling environment for basic services as the cornerstone of the life and prosperity of our communities. To foster educational policies that can develop human capacities and creativity and promote equal opportunities in quality education. For women and girls to be represented in all facets of public life. To protect life above land and below water through a change in our relationship with our ecosystems and in economic models through a system of cities approach. To strengthen the localization of the SDGs to promote the ownership and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda at local and regional levels.

Efforts shared among local and regional governments and their networks and partners in maintaining local service provision and fostering peace through city diplomacy will be critical to reach these shared objectives.

In this sense, and following the SDGs in review in 2022, the constituency of local and regional governments calls on the HLPF to:

- Include local and regional governments, who have understood the importance of the current context and the **vitality of basic services as the lever for improving the lives of our neighbors**, in decisions at all levels that involve service provision and mitigating the negative impacts of complex emergencies.
- **Foster 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 the population.
- **Recognize the importance of city diplomacy as the transformative diplomacy that local and regional governments can bring to the table in times of crisis** and the key role that decentralized cooperation can play as an integral element to enhance our ability to foster peace and solidarity.

- **Build upon the display of care provided by local and regional governments** over the past years and recognize care as the dimension that needs to be incorporated into any and all policy decisions to protect the most vulnerable, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons, and those living in informality.
- **Prioritize education as a motor for sustainable development and strengthen it as an essential public service** responding to the needs of all and to the increasingly digital world.
- **Guarantee access and participation in cultural life as an antidote to crises** and as a critical driver of sustainable development and shift towards caring systems.
- **Mainstream gender equality and women empowerment within all policy-making processes** and recognize the transformative power that feminist policy making has in addressing inequalities, overcoming climate change, and achieving the SDGs.
- **Foster the inclusion of women and girls in local leadership** and promote participatory, inclusive approaches that ensure all voices are accounted for and represented in decision-making.
- **Strengthen capacities of local and regional governments in building sustainable management models of our ecosystems and biodiversity** to protect life on land and below water.
- **Strengthen the role of intermediary cities, small towns, and rural areas** and territories in the achievement of the universal development agendas.
- **Highlight the crucial role of multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder collaboration in the protection of our oceans** and the inclusion of cities and territories in ocean related policy making beyond coastal areas.
- **Rethink fiscal architecture and strengthening local finance** to achieve the universal development agendas.
- **Consider VLR and VSR processes as policy consolidation opportunities that are integral to foster ownership and achievement of the universal development agendas** and recognize VLRs and VSRs in official HLPF deliberations.
- **Involve local and regional governments and their associations in VNR processes, and promote the development of VLRs and VSRs** (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).
- **Leverage linkages between the New Urban Agenda and the universal development agendas** to ensure service delivery, and coordination among spheres of government to accelerate their implementation.
- **Foster a renewed, more inclusive, multilateral system based on ownership, co-creation and peace**, including and engaging local and regional governments and their representative associations in all stages of decision-making processes.



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