

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

Learning Session with Local Government Associations: multiplying and upscaling of measures

Briefing & Learning Note
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Launched jointly by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Metropolis, and UN-Habitat on March 25th, 2020, the **#BeyondTheOutbreak** Live Learning Experience (LLE) virtual sessions aim to bring together Local and Regional Governments (LRGs), their associations, and partner organizations to allow and promote meaningful exchange as they find themselves confronting the COVID-19 crisis while maintaining an orderly functioning of public services. Following an initial consultation held during the launching session, and the first thematic sessions on Housing and Mobility, the **third thematic LLE**, held on Thursday, April 9th, was devoted to promoting a **collective reflection on the relationship between local government associations and the COVID-19 crisis**.

COVID-19: Local and Regional Government Associations challenges and initiatives in the face of the outbreak

While cities all around the world are faced with tremendous challenges in terms of health care, economy, housing and mobility, because of the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, national and regional associations of local governments have been playing an important role as linking pin towards the central governments and other stakeholders, on behalf of all their members.

160 participants from all continents gathered from their homes in the fourth session of the Live Learning Experience (LLE) on Thursday, April 9th, 2020. This event gathered national and regional associations of local governments, from all continents. The session was chaired by the UCLG Secretary General, Emilia Saiz and the Director of the Global Solutions Division of UN-Habitat Raf Tuts.

The opening words were provided by Jan van Zanen, president of the Association of Netherlands municipalities (VNG), mayor of Utrecht and co-president of UCLG: *"In my direct context, the 25 mayors from my region manage the crisis measures together in a crisis structure. I lead in the region of Utrecht, meaning that I am in contact with mayors of my region, and also in direct contact with national governments on how to implement measures at local level. In addition to the crisis structure the work of associations is critical, being a linking pin between the national and local level, for serving as a focal point for the private sector looking for relief from local government, for answering questions from our membership and for keeping our local democracy alive."*

His message was complemented by Brock Carlton, CEO of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), who highlighted the important role of the associations in laying out demands from their members to national governments. In his words: *"We [LGAs] need to roll up the individual challenges and concerns into an aggregated, coherent*





set of policies and programs that we can advocate on behalf of the membership...The role of associations has never been more relevant and important than it is today.”

The session was an opportunity to highlight the challenges and priority actions of Local Government Associations (LGAs) in responding to this crisis. Throughout the session over 10 LGAs shared a diversity of experience about the challenges they and their members face, as well as their priorities in responding to this crisis. While the thematic focus of LGAs has shifted to COVID-19, responsibilities to their membership of Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) remain the same:

- liaising on behalf of members with national and subnational of governments,
- service delivery towards members,
- the provision of learning and exchange possibilities.

Contributions from the 10 LGAs to the discussion are summarized around shared themes. Home confinement has become one of the main measures taken across the world to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and prevent the collapse of health systems while there is no official medical treatment for the virus. Nevertheless, this policy entails different challenges for LRGs around the world as a result of the different realities they face.

Particularly since Habitat III, the constituency of LRGs has increased its efforts to ensure populations' right to adequate housing as a necessary precondition for the fulfillment of many other human rights. Through The Shift campaign led by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, and the "*Municipalist Declaration of Cities for Adequate Housing*" (2018) promoted by UCLG and its Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy, and Human Rights, LRGs articulated their call for increased capacities to advance their populations' right to housing. These call includes the need to endow LRGs with the capacities to combat the financialization of housing markets, increase and improve the stock of public housing, promote new partnerships and community-led housing and mobilize planning tools to implement inclusive housing policies as part of urban development strategies. These efforts were reflected in UCLG's Report "*Rethinking Housing Policies: Harnessing local innovation to address the global housing crisis*" (2019).

Nevertheless, the velocity and ferocity with which COVID-19 has hit our societies and put pressure on housing systems have far exceeded the pace at which progress was being made. This crisis entails a point of no return. It is showing that having access to adequate housing is indeed a matter of life and death and that it is LRGs who,





being at the frontline of the fight against the virus and the sphere of government closest to the citizens, are stepping forward and providing solutions to the real needs on the ground. Life cannot go on as before, nor can the way we run cities and house their inhabitants.

Service delivery: Challenges & Priority Actions

LGAs are sources of trusted information for LRGs

Speakers expressed that mixed messaging is common and sourcing reliable information is difficult for LRGs. In some countries there is a disconnect in technical and political messaging, while in some cases politicians are publicly delivering contradicting messages. Up to date information is difficult to obtain given rapidly evolving situations and governments regulations, which have consequences on the operations of LRGs.

As such, LGAs are being relied upon by their members for trustworthy and current information. LGAs must ensure that information, especially concerning regulations, reaches their membership. LGAs distribute information by dedicated websites directed to LRGs, and regular newsletters.

Logistics

LRGs across the world have varying levels of capacity to respond to COVID-19. For those without the capacity to face the crisis themselves, LGAs themselves are on the front lines of service delivery. In some cases, LGAs are playing an active role in connecting LRGs to suppliers of personal protective equipment and with coordinating movements of front line health care workers between regions.

Transitioning to remote working

This crisis is pushing LRGs to digitalize their workplaces. LGAs are supporting members and overseas partners in their transition through communication and e-learning.

Partnerships

Private sectors and universities have largely expressed interest in helping support the work of LRGs. LGAs are taking a coordinating role in communicating the needs of their members to these new partners. In many cases these partners are providing research, goods, services, and help in awareness raising. For some this has resulted in improved relationships between the private sector and municipalities.





Intergovernmental Relations: Challenges & Priority Actions

While relationships with national governments remain rocky for some LGAs - with some expressing that they have been left out of crisis planning meetings of critical importance to LRGs - many have also seen an improvement in their relationships.

LGAs are an important bridge between LRGs and national governments

LGAs are working to reduce miscommunications between national governments by holding regular phone calls, clarifying government messaging and directing members to the appropriate national agencies. Speakers expressed the need for listening and understanding, both ways. LGAs are also supporting national government initiatives for data collection and delivery of government messaging.

Advocacy

LGAs continue to play an, important as ever, role in advocating for the needs of their members. In this time of crisis, speakers affirmed that the need for democracy at the local level is more important than ever. LGAs are focusing on collecting input from members of rapidly evolving needs and ensuring that policies consider local experiences and impacts on local governments. LGAs have set up dedicated channels of communications, such as open phone lines, web feedback portals, social media groups and consultations. Largely, LGAs are aiming to communicate a coherent set of policy needs to national governments. Though diverse across regions, many LGAs are advocating along common themes.

Adequate supplies of personal protective equipment

LGAs are aware of where stocks of personal protective equipment are critically needed and are communicating these needs to national governments.

Financial support for municipalities

While LRGs are under immense pressure to provide essential services, this crisis has already led to a massive drop in revenue for municipalities. LGAs are advocating for financial support that is responsive to the needs.

Financial support for local economies

Local-level food and cultural sectors are being greatly affect by this crisis and are seeking financial support from municipalities. LGAs are communicating those needs and the needs of workers to national governments in the development of financial support.





Adjusting legislative requirements

LGAs are advocating for legislation that provide municipalities flexibility in meeting legislative requirements for conducting municipal affairs such as approving budgets, reallocating funds or online decision-making.

Equity impacts of policy

LGAs are advocating to national and sub-national governments to consider the equity impacts of governmental responses, specifically mentioned were existing urban-rural divides as well as for impacts on the economically marginalized.

Learning & Exchange: Challenges & Priority Actions

LGAs are encouraging learning and exchange between members

LGAs have set up websites, fora and social media groups and are using their new and existing communication platforms to share good examples between members, as well as with national governments. Several LGAs are answering member inquiries at all hours of the day, through telephone lines open to the membership.

International Learning & Exchange

Despite decreased movement of people across border, there is an increased need for global cooperation. As LRGs across the world are experiencing different waves of this crisis, LGAs are using existing international infrastructures to help provide LRGs that still face the highest peak with resources and information from areas that have endured such a peak already.

International forums are being used to share the experience of countries that are flattening the curve with those who are still working to curb the rise in cases. LGAs are facilitating dialogue between local mayors and mayors of other countries. This is especially useful in the case where there is a lack of adequate response and poor coordination with central governments. LGAs are critical links in connecting local governments to capacity abroad. UCLG's Capacity and Institution Building Working Group (CIB) is one network that is helping facilitate this learning.

CIB Working Group

This group facilitates exchange between peers from the local government sector, to enable duplication of good practices, innovation in the sector, and coordination in the field. Many contributors to this group have experience in crisis management efforts all around the world. CIB has created a [Google Drive](#), which acts as an online library, full of templates, action plans and methodologies used by local and regional

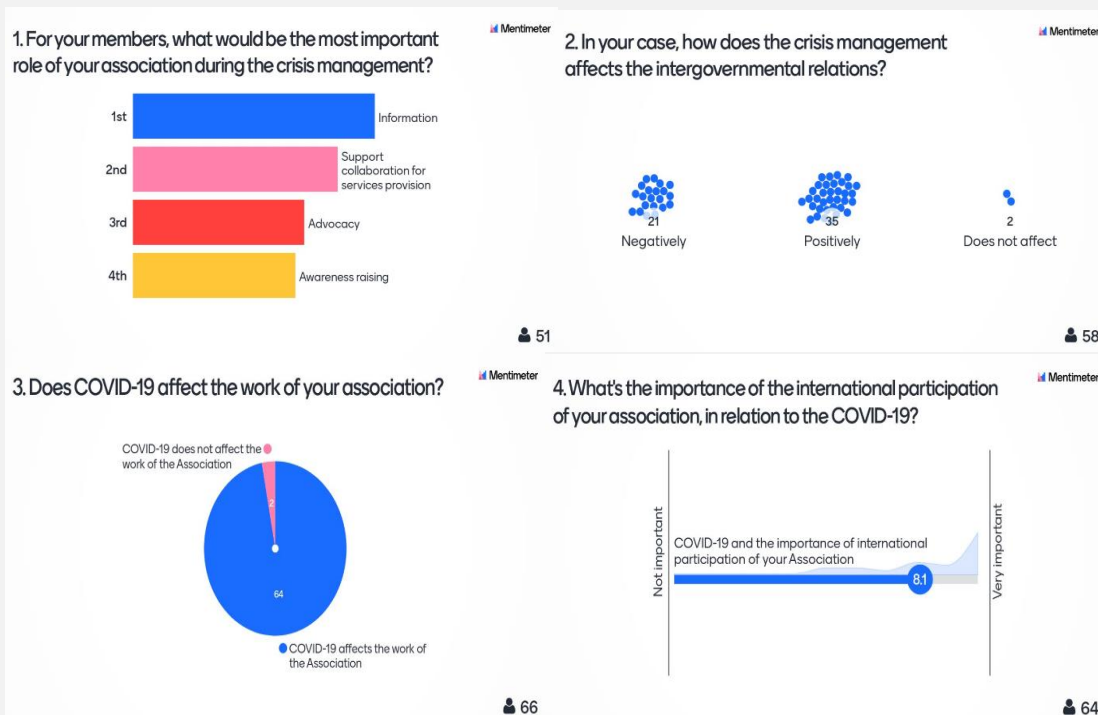




governments and their associations. UCLG members can share their action plans and other relevant documents in the [Google Drive](#). CIB will gather the most valuable documents and background resources in a biweekly COVID-19 mailing. To register for this mailing, go to the CIB-website www.cib-uclg.org.

Live participant consultation

A wide variety of LGAs participated in the discussion by responding to a live survey. Though experiences vary across countries, these results highlight common trends. 97% of LGAs responded that COVID-19 has affected the work of their associations (66 responding). 60% responded that intergovernmental relations have improved throughout this crisis (58 respondents). LGAs responded that the most important roles they have played to members during throughout this crisis are, in decreasing priority: providing reliable and timely information, supporting collaboration in service provision, advocacy, and awareness raising (51 respondents). Finally, participants made it clear that international participation of their LGAs is important in the fight against COVID-19 (64 respondents).





Looking beyond this crisis

Though this crisis has stretched LRGs to their limit, it does present some opportunities. Speakers expressed that this crisis has awoken citizens and that they have seen immense displays of solidarity between citizens. It is the challenge of LGAs to translate that solidarity across borders. Many LGAs have already seen improved working relationships with national governments. The critical role of LRGs are playing in health services and social assistance may lead to an evolved relationship with national governments moving forward. LGAs can begin to start advocating inclusion of local consideration financing in financial packages.

This crisis will end, and as the Secretary General of the United Nations said "The recovery from the COVID-19 crisis must lead to a different economy"¹. In that recovery there is an opportunity for a more equitable post-COVID world. Keeping in mind the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, LGAs can advocate for a rethink of not only intergovernmental relations but of entire economies, and come out stronger from this. Speakers emphasized that this recovery will require stronger institutions and an increased capacity in the public service to respond to emergencies.

This crisis reminds us how interconnected we are globally and reinforces the need for cooperation. This spirit was captured by Carla Rey, Secretary General of the Association of Cities and Regions for Italy in a call for coherence at the national level, solidarity at the international level to implement the values of the Sustainable Development Goals, and unity between local government associations.

Emilia Saiz, Secretary General of UCLG, closed the session highlighting the importance of Local and Regional Government Associations beyond the pandemics: *"It'll be around Local and Regional Government Associations that the aftermath needs to be structured. Local and Regional Government Associations will need to play an important role on the dialogue with national governments and with the international community."*

¹ un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/launch-report-socio-economic-impacts-covid-19





Annex: Local challenges and priority actions

The first part of the session featured four CEOs from various local government associations, who shared the main challenges and priority actions of their associations. While their experience is reflected in the themes above, their presentations ground these themes in locally distinct experiences.

These presenters spoke about challenges presented by the current situation in their country, and their priority actions moving forward.

Country, Representative	Current challenges	Priority actions being taken
Brazil Paulo Oliveira, National Confederation of Municipalities (FNP)	Lack of coordination between federal and other orders of government, little political support from a president who is not aligning messaging with that of health authorities, and difficulty in acquiring enough testing kits.	Working on acquiring more testing kits, there is an active WhatsApp group to foster communication between cities and helping connect Brazilian mayors to local authorities in other countries.
Spain Juana López Pagán, Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP)	Local governments do not have a voice in crisis management meetings taking place, and concerns that the crisis as well as policy response will fuel urban-rural inequality.	Hosted 200 consultations in 3 weeks to create an online hub (covid19.femp.es/) for reliable information useful to local authorities. They collect inquiries and share information through curated FAQs and regular circulars.
South Africa Lance Joel,	Conflicting information is reaching citizens especially with politicians contradicting each other on national television, financial security is jeopardized, as	Developed a communication platform for mayors and municipal managers and contributes to the national command centre. Standardizing how





South African Local Governments' Association (SALGA)	municipalities cannot collect revenue yet under tremendous pressure to continue delivery of essential services, and difficulties obtaining adequate supplies of personal protective equipment.	municipalities report their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic useful in advocating for additional funding. Successfully advocated to national governments to allow for lenience in municipal legislative procedures, and to create funding mechanisms to support municipalities in COVID-19 spread prevention measures.
The Philippines Veronica Hitois, League of Cities of The Philippines (LCP)	Resistance of national governments to conduct mass testing resulting in a lack of reliable data, an ongoing rocky relationship between LCP and national governments, a lack of isolation facilities with cities left to create more themselves, and ensuring equitable national government responses and that the poor are not left behind.	Helping local authorities connect with appropriate national ministries and government agencies, advocated to national government to allow municipalities to reallocate budgets for crisis response. LCP act as main point of contact between members and suppliers of personal protective equipment, in monitoring needs of members, as well as coordinating movement logistics of frontline medical workers between regions.
France Geneviève Sevrin Cités Unies France		Demonstrating international solidarity by establishing a support fund, focused on leveraging existing partnerships with LRGs of African nations to ensure they have adequate resources necessary to fight the spread of COVID-19.





<p>Italy</p> <p>Carla Rey</p> <p>AICCRE</p>		<p>1. Focus on solidarity, coherence and unity: we need to learn from our lessons and best practices</p> <p>2. The EU has common lines of response, but some member states take other measures, closing borders instead of providing aid to other countries, there is no solidarity between people</p> <p>3. We have to improve international cooperation activities and that is what SDGs stand for. We have to assist our members to cooperate and strengthen our advocacy activities</p> <p>4. Claim for coherency at the national level, solidarity at the international level and unity between Local Government Associations.</p>
<p>Ecuador</p> <p>Edwin Miño</p> <p>Director General del Consorcio de Gobiernos Provinciales de Ecuador (CONGOPE)</p>		<p>1. Nature is giving us a new opportunity, to learn and recover. We were self-centered in the past. There is no recipe to overcome this crisis. We don't know how the economy is going to afterwards, but are we going to return to the normality in which only 1% of the</p>





		<p>population possesses all the wealth?</p> <p>2. We have to resume the concept of the public. We have to find an agreement between the private and public sector which is focused on the local, including local production.</p>
<p>Indonesia</p> <p>Sri Indah Wibi Nastiti</p> <p>APEKSI</p>		<p>1. Support national governments to collect data from member cities in terms of needs, health equipment, food etc.</p> <p>2. Connect private sector and universities with public sector --> private sector wants to help local governments to provide goods and services</p> <p>3. Share best practices to inspire other Local Governments</p> <p>4. Provide webinars on specific issues that are not made clear by the national government--> not all Local governments have the needed online systems but they will have to follow</p>
<p>Cemal Bas, UMT, Turkey</p>		<p>1. Coordinate efforts between LGs and national governments --> give info to national</p>





		governments for new projects? 2. Prepare for what COVID brings to urban life
Mauricio Zanin (CNM Brasil)	2. The political and technical are disconnected	1. Maintain the resources of municipalities and assist them to create an emergency plan

Resources

All the presentations made by Local Government Associations during this Live Learning Experience are available [here](#).

All the videos of the session are available [here](#).

Additional information can be found on this [Google Drive](#) provided by the CIB.

The [Cities for Global Health Platform](#), facilitated by Metropolis, is also a living repository of other LRGs' initiatives to confront the COVID-19 crisis. For further information, please refer to the related resources that have been developed by UCLG and our partners, as well as to those shared by LRGs during the LLE.

