Policy recommendations: our roadmap to accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda through the localization of the SDGs

The transformation that needs to be brought about to achieve the global agendas will only occur if our development model responds to the dreams and expectations of communities, and if there is collective responsibility to make the necessary adjustments and sacrifices to achieve more equitable, fair and sustainable societies.

The global agendas must either be local or they simply will not be. The constituency of local and regional governments (LRGs) has a critical role to play to catalyse change and provide the kind of service delivery that will deliver inclusion, efficient use of resources and sustainability. This LRG constituency shares the sense of urgency to scale-up and accelerate such a transformation.

The findings of the GOLD V Report have inspired policy recommendations that build upon the 'Bogota Commitment and Action Agenda' adopted by the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) in 2016, as well as the annual reports of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments to the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) since 2017.

In a context of increasing inequalities, endangerment of ecosystems and tensions that are threatening human solidarity, the GOLD V Report presents the efforts of a key constituency that serves communities responding to their needs and hopes. It is a positive message about the impact that well-resourced localization can have in a new vision for the sustainability of our planet. The recommendations are addressed to local and regional leaders and their organizations, to our partners, national governments, international organizations, civil society and social actors, as well as to the business sector.

Local and regional governments lead the way towards a more equal and sustainable world

In the globalized urbanization era, the actions of cities and LRGs are integral to the global agendas: it is at the local level that the interrelationship between the different agendas most clearly manifests itself. With regard to the global agendas, getting the 2030 Agenda commitments right necessitates the full implementation of the principles of the New Urban Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, that in turn are fundamental to changing the patterns of production and consumption as the basic premise of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The following recommendations situate the LRGs as drivers of an alternative territorial approach to development (TALD).

Actions at local and regional levels

Galvanize forces for the localization of the 2030 Agenda in our cities and territories

LRGs and their global and regional organizations have pioneered the localization of the SDGs. To make the 'quantum leap' currently needed they must:

- Adopt the **SDGs as a reference framework** for LRGs' policies, programming, planning and budgets, ensuring a coherent and integrated approach — mindful of the Paris Climate Agreement,the Sendai Framework and empowered by the principles of the New Urban Agenda.

- Embolden ambitions by fostering **greater ownership** of the communities and attain real **local buy-in** of policies. Co-creation with other local stakeholders will be critical in the definition, implementation and assessment of the localization process.

- Share and learn: Participate in LRG networks and invest in **peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing**, practice exchange and training. Fostering and accessing technical assistance and decentralized cooperation to promote the localization of the SDGs will be key.

- Link with science: Serve as catalyser to foster partnerships with research institutions and promote **'labs' to experiment** with innovative ways to implement, review and follow-up the localization process.

Protect the commons, human rights and culture as foundations of peace

The preservation of the global commons (biodiversity, land, atmosphere, oceans) that determine the survival of all living beings, as well as the protection of peace, cultural diversity and human rights, require strong local action and LRGs' commitment to:

- Foster an **ecological and systemic relationship between people and nature**. LRGs must support cohesion of the 'urban-rural continuum' and strengthen the interconnected policies that halt deforestation and desertification; effectively manage the current network of protected areas, including terrestrial, freshwater (both surface and ground) and marine areas; and improve human wellbeing, particularly of indigenous populations and communities whose livelihoods depend on forests, water and soil conservation and climate change mitigation.

- Achieve **climate neutrality in cities and territories**, taking into account the life-long cycle of GHG emissions to proactively tackle climate emergency. Decoupling socio-economic development from environmental degradation calls for well-planned urban development and land management; responsible and fair management of natural resources and waste; at the same time ensuring reduction of inequalities. It implies divesting from fossil fuels to free up resources. These can be invested to accelerate scaling-up the protection of most vulnerable populations and ecosystems, and offsetting any emissions that cannot be further reduced or avoided.

- Contribute to **holding global warming to 1.5°C** by the end of the 21st century, through the collective definition of Territorially Determined Contributions (TDCs) feeding into the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for the implementation of the provisions of the Paris Climate Agreement. Support the post-2020 negotiation of the global biodiversity framework, as well as the Convention on Wetlands of International and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

- Promote peace and city diplomacy by tackling the roots of local violence, educating for its eradication and to create a mindset that makes it possible to build a culture of dialogue in cities and territories. Foster cities and territories as spaces for **co-existence and peace** through measures that fight interpersonal violence, extremism, racism, xenophobia, gender-based violence and other forms of intolerance, and introduce measures to integrate all citizens.

- Promote **culture as the fourth pillar of development** and as a core component of local identity, a strand of global solidarity, and a vector for peace and human rights. Foster locally relevant cultural policies and programmes on memory, heritage, creativity, diversity and knowledge as intrinsic to local sustainable development.

Put human rights and the 'Right to the City' at the core of the local agendas – strengthen inclusive local policies to 'leave no one behind'

Given its multiple dimensions, the eradication of extreme poverty is inextricably linked to the protection of human rights. LRGs should put the 'Right to the City' at the centre of urban and territorial governance to ensure universal access to quality basic services, nutritious food, health and education, economic opportunities, access to adequate housing and disaster risk prevention for the most vulnerable. These are essential components of territorialized pro-poor policies. Partnerships with communities and community-based organisations are instrumental to create alternative solutions, particularly where public services are scarcely delivered. LRGs should commit to:

- **Remove any discriminatory legal and social policy** at the local level to ensure equal opportunities for all, particularly for women, indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, the LGBTQIA+ populations, the elderly, the youth, and people with mental and physical disabilities. Facilitate migrants and refugees access to rights and services regardless of their status.

- Tackle **gender-based discrimination and violence** with tailored policies, budgets and legal reforms. LRGs can raise awareness and reinforce education on the changing conception of gender roles. Women must be equally represented and granted equal powers in decision-making forums. It is necessary to enact gender-sensitive policies in territories that promote equal access to health and education and acknowledge the role of women in the domestic and informal economy. Gender equality has a multiplier effect in advancing sustainable development, environmental protection and social justice.

- Support the fulfilment of the **right to adequate housing for all**, which includes affordability, legal security of tenure, habitability, accessibility and cultural adequacy standards and must be understood within the framework of the 'Right to the City'. Promote inclusionary housing policies and slum upgrading initiatives that are undertaken in partnership with the communities and seek to avoid forced evictions.

- Promote the **Principles of Open Government** as a tool for the improvement of policy ownership and accountability. Create spaces and mechanisms that favour citizen participation in local decision-making, access to information and communities' ownership of the 2030 Agenda and other global agendas.

Harness the co-creation of cities and territories through sustainable participative urban and land planning

Planning needs to be the result of the political, economic and social systems within which it is embedded. Deep reforms on planning regulations and frameworks are a critical part of SDG localization and the New Urban Agenda. This includes the need to produce qualified professional planners and researchers. By renewing participatory urban and spatial planning, LRGs should:

- Adopt an **integrated planning approach**, as reflected in the New Urban Agenda, to strengthen the inclusive dimension of cities, climate adaptation and mitigation and disaster risk prevention strategies, and multiply the benefits of interlinkages between urban and territorial areas. Inclusive and participatory planning are key levers for the co-creation of sustainable and inclusive cities and territories.

- Build capacities and retain **local expertise** to address rapid urbanization with adapted approaches to reduce urban sprawl and avoid costlier retrofitting. Most urgent actions are needed in regions where rapid urban growth will be concentrated (Sub-Saharan Africa and South and South-East Asia).

- Scale-up efforts to build **urban resilience and disaster risk preparation**, involving local communities, particularly vulnerable groups, in particular in coastal cities and Small Developing Island States (SIDS).

- Contribute to promoting **'polycentric' urban development** to reduce core-periphery divides, promote more compact and social-mix neighbourhoods, reduce inequalities and avoid urban segregation.

- Create or preserve **open public spaces** to boost inclusion and protect urban heritage and culture, while also pursuing innovative solutions to foster creativity for sustainable urban development.

- **Curb urban sprawl**, reduce distance between home and work places to reduce commuting times and encourage access to alternative and safe modes of mobility (including walkable cities) to reduce GHG emissions. Urban and

spatial planning can lead to transformative use of renewable energy, and reduce the ecological footprint of cities and territories, greening public infrastructure and spaces, reducing air and waste pollution, and reducing risks such as floods, drought or urban heat island effects.

- Improve relationships with the surrounding peri-urban and rural areas, avoid land degradation, and improve **food security** and farmers' livelihoods.

- Enhance the management of **natural protected areas** and ecosystem services, such as upstream watershed areas that the city relies on for fresh water supply, and support reforestation.

Improve access to sustainable and inclusive public services in cities and territories

LRGs need to develop an integrated and systemic approach that will guarantee universal reach. This includes universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation, to quality education and health, to public affordable and sustainable mobility, to integrated waste management and to affordable and clean energy. LRGs need to:

- Develop **infrastructure plans** alongside urban land-use plans, including long-term investment strategies to guide economic and spatial expansion, especially where there are pressures for growth.

- Reduce the **environmental impact** of urban infrastructures and contribute to communities' resilience.

- Support **inter-municipal cooperation** or specific mechanisms that guarantee collaborations to ensure full coverage and adequate quality delivery in territories, be it in metropolitan areas, cities or peri-urban areas, or between neighbouring municipalities in rural areas.

- Guarantee access to affordable services exploring new universal models of service co-production, taking advantage of new decentralized technologies; support small-scale businesses as basic service providers and improve the **quality oversight of services**; and gradually insert the informal economy into the organization of public service delivery.

- Improve the management, delivery and transparency of public basic services, and facilitate innovative **partnerships for co-production and co-management**.

Focus on the future of jobs and local economic development (LED)

It is now urgent to steer a course away from the patterns of economic growth, consumption and production of goods and services that perpetuate deprivations, generate inequalities, deplete the global commons and threaten to cause irreversible damage to the environment. LRGs should therefore:

- Promote LED that helps generate **sustainable socio-economic development tailored** to the particular needs and contexts of cities and territories, and ensure decent work and respect for responsible sustainability standards.

- Prioritize **quality local employment**, as a right, and tailor fully-fledged policies responsive to the barriers faced by and vulnerabilities of specific groups, including women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities or people with disabilities among others; likewise find inclusive solutions to involve migrants regardless of their status; and facilitate intergenerational knowledge transfers to preserve, disseminate and evolve local know-how and crafts.

- Create spaces for **local innovation** in order to nurture and scale-up local capacities, including those enabled by technology and nature-based industries; develop synergies with local initiatives; support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that contribute to sustainable growth and to create employment in their local environments, give impulse to productive clusters and cooperative strategies both within and between sectors and territories.

- Ensure that **new technologies and e-platforms** do not widen the divide that is consolidating poor-quality employment, or priviledge extractive systems of production that do not support communities' social cohesion, connectedness and wellbeing. Develop policies to protect people's privacy, and foster traditional local small business.

- Promote **alternative economic models** such as the transition towards a circular and green economy; support the social and collaborative economy and sustainable tourism. Support the transition towards territorialized food systems that foster good health while minimizing environmental impact; and support efforts to reduce the environmental footprint.

- Recognize the critical role that the **informal economy** plays in the urban fabric. Because of this contribution and the growing number of

workers involved in informal economy activities (estimated at over two billion people worldwide, among which women are 'over-represented'), LRGs need to take necessary steps and support and create initiatives to help entrepreneurs in the informal economy. This must support them to evolve their activities towards the social and solidary economy, and promote the creation of mechanisms to facilitate access to social protection.

- Create enabling conditions, capacities and confidence to mobilize the transformative power of **public procurement**, while respecting the autonomy of LRGs to set their own policy priorities. This should be done by mainstreaming and implementing sustainable and decent work policies, and fair, labour-friendly and environmental clauses, and by encouraging a culture of transparent public contracts and disclosure.

At the global and national levels

Foster a global-local movement to localize the SDGs. Localization should be a pillar of national sustainable strategies to implement the SDGs

To achieve the 2030 agendas on time, the pace of change needs to accelerate and ambitions need to be bolder. National governments and international organizations should work in collaboration with LRGs and their networks to increase the outreach and strengthen partnerships of the 'whole-of-government' with the 'whole-of-society' to boost localization. National governments should:

- Integrate (or strengthen) robust **localization strategies** in their sustainable development strategies and action plans to expand the involvement of LRGs and local actors, accelerating and upscaling territorial sustainable development. Localization strategies should be mainstreamed in all plans, programmes and budgets from national to local levels.

- Coordinated strategies for the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs, the Paris Climate Agreement and the New Urban Agenda are an imperative. **No single agenda can be addressed in isolation**. National sustainable development plans (NSDPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Climate Agreement and national urban policies (NUPs), as well as other strategic plans, need to be articulated in order to overcome sectoral fragmented strategies, improve the allocation of resources and boost implementation at all levels, from global to local and vice-versa.

Create an 'enabling institutional environment' for localization – empowered local and regional governments and adequate financing flows to support localization are an imperative

Effective decentralization policies are intrinsic to empowering LRGs and supporting SDG localization. The principles of effective decentralization are defined in the International Guidelines on Decentralization, adopted by the UN-Habitat Governing Council in 2007.

- LRGs need the respect of **local autonomy and subsidiarity principles** to be respected in order to respond to the demands of their inhabitants, to innovate and adapt national policies and the SDGs to the local context. Urgent actions are needed to unlock LRGs' potential to localize the SDGS and ensure access to basic services for all.

- Access to **basic social services** is a universal principle acknowledged by the UN and a building block for human development. LRGs need to be empowered and accountable to ensure the delivery of quality basic services for all, defined as direct or shared responsibilities in the legal frameworks of a majority of countries, to achieve the principle to 'leave no one behind' — one of the core objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

- LRGs' adequate **fiscal powers and capacities**, as acknowledged by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (paragraph 34) need strengthened local tax systems, including the power to capture part of land and property added-value; a better allocation of national fiscal revenues through fair, regular and predictable intergovernmental transfers; and access to responsible borrowing to invest in sustainable public services and

infrastructures. Environmental taxes should be considered to advance energy transition and enshrine the 'polluter pays' principle into financing frameworks. Equalization funds are also necessary to ensure the adequate redistribution of resources across the whole territory to avoid 'leaving any territory behind', paying particular attention to intermediary cities and small towns and promoting more balanced and 'polycentric' urban systems.

- To mobilize national and international **sustainable investments** toward cities and territories, national policies and legal frameworks should be revised. An appropriate range of debt finance options needs to be adapted and made accessible to LRGs, one that considers multiple sources of financing and innovative financial instruments. It is also necessary to adopt vertically aligned NDC investment plans and open or facilitate LRGs' access to climate and green funds.

- Facilities supporting cities in making transformative projects reach **bankability and creditworthiness** standards are essential and require strong backing and leadership to close financing gaps and enhance match-making opportunities, either through specific funds, or connecting cities with potential financiers. The next phase, already in motion, is to support a more diverse set of financial mechanisms that are adapted to the different capacities of cities and territories, such as the upcoming International Municipal Investment Fund, set up by the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and UCLG with the support of the Global Fund for Cities Development.

- The promise of 'blended finance' can only be fulfilled with the creation of **adequate regulatory frameworks** and with support for LRGs in setting up partnerships with the private sector. These must be mutually beneficial and have clear contractual parameters ensuring that the needs of their citizens come first and that the poor and vulnerable groups are not 'left behind'.

Effective involvement of all spheres of government, civil society and key stakeholders is imperative to strengthen the governance of the SDGs and the localization process

Strong partnerships and the participation of LRGs, civil society, private sector, social partners and academia in SDG implementation, are critical to achieve the 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-society' approaches called for by the SDGs. It is also crucial to ensure policy and institutional coherence both internally and externally. Without the active and collaborative involvement of all stakeholders, the SDGs will remain aspirational goals.

- At the national level, there is much to do in terms of effectively involving LRGs and stakeholders in the **national coordination mechanisms** for the implementation of the SDGs. Limited consultations and uncoordinated decision-making presently hinder the policy coherence necessary to achieve the SDGs targets and reduce local ownership.

- Integrated national planning systems are at the core of **functional multilevel governance systems** and need to be revamped to enhance the coordination between national governments, LRGs and local stakeholders. A renewed approach to planning that articulates national strategies with strong local initiatives in active collaboration could recalibrate development policies, facilitate burgeoning local actions and promote institutional innovation. This collaboration needs to be founded on the respect of the principle of subsidiarity.

- As decision-makers, LRGs need to be involved in the definition, implementation and follow-up of NDCs and national strategies for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. National urban policies (NUPs), adopted (or in the course of being adopted) by more than 92 countries, need to be integrated in national development strategies (NDSs) to take advantage of the cumulative benefits of urbanization and identify **cross-sector synergies to support SDG implementation**.

- **Horizontal cooperation** at the sub-national level (e.g. intra and inter-municipal cooperation) needs adequate governance mechanisms, tools and fiscal policies to foster urban-rural partnerships and reinforce the management of growing metropolitan areas. Coordination will also strengthen interconnections and cooperation between territories for service delivery and key environmental issues that require reinforced and trans-jurisdictional (and often trans-boundary) actions, such as the management of river catchments and environmental resources.

Support the production and dissemination of disaggregated data for monitoring, evaluation and impact measurement of the localization of the global agendas, including the SDGs

- LRG involvement in the global and **national monitoring and reporting processes** on SDG implementation is crucial and should not be limited to ad hoc consultations. The process of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) needs improvement, to ensure the fully-fledged participation of LRGs that brings the voice of the territories and local actors to the process.

- Fragmented reporting systems hinder ownership and the institutionalization of the SDGs across different spheres of government. Strengthening **local reporting capacities** and closing the data gap require particular attention and support. National and local capacities to define and collect disaggregated and localized data should be part of SDG localization strategies to ensure that planning processes at all levels are founded on realistic targets and that effective implementation can be monitored, as well as to ensure accountability and citizen follow-up.

- Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) contributing to national monitoring and to the global debate, and promoting knowledge-sharing and emulation between LRGs, are opportunities that need specific support and acknowledgment.

A global governance system that brings together local and regional governments and civil society will boost the implementation of the global agendas

- The UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) will need to be reshaped to enhance the participation of different stakeholders, as well as facilitate **true innovation and learning**. The HLPF should be an effective multilateral and multi-stakeholder space for dialogue, exchange and knowledge-sharing in order to reinforce multilateral collaboration and partnerships and ensure the real oversight of commitments, policy agreements and implementation.

- The consolidation of the **Local and Regional Governments Forum** is essential as a critical space for interactions between the LRGs, UN Member States, and the UN system. Furthermore, multilevel dialogues need to embolden the local-global leadership, as proposed in the 'Seville Commitment'.

At the continental level, **LRGs' enhanced involvement in the regional forums** (e.g. Regional Forums on Sustainable Development, co-organized by regional UN Commissions), in multi-stakeholder platforms (e.g. the European platform) and spaces (e.g. urban forums) will enhance policy exchange to foster SDG localization and the active involvement of LRGs in the monitoring of the SDGs and related agendas. ◉

The audience at the Local and Regional Governments' Forum, HLPF, 16 July 2018, New York (photo: UCLG-CGLU/Joel Sheakosk, bit.ly/31UjlHR).