

## **Briefing - Advisory Group of the United Nations Secretary-General on Local and Regional Governments**

### **Background**

The Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments has been exchanging with the UN SG and his office resulting in the following milestones (in chronological order):

- The commissioning of a report on behalf of the Local and Regional Government constituency to contribute to the 75th Anniversary Vision of the United Nations (UN75).
- The UN75 report contributed directly to the Secretary-General's final report "**Defining the Future Together**".
- Consultation of our constituency to the "**We the People**" report, commissioned by the UN SG to the Igarape Institute. In the report "We the People" our constituency is explicitly mentioned as a collaborator of the consultation of the local and regional governments constituency through the GTF.

*These reports were the basis of the Secretary General's "**Our Common Agenda**", which looks ahead to the next 25 years and represents the Secretary-General's vision on the future of global cooperation. The document speaks on how to reinvigorate inclusive, networked, and effective multilateralism. The Secretary-General presented his report to the General Assembly in September 2021 before the end of the 75th session of the General Assembly.*

- The "Our Common Agenda" roadmap to 2023/2024 proposes twenty recommendations to encourage more ambitious, forward-looking thinking and deliberation on global governance innovation leading up to the 2024 **UN Summit of the Future**.
- As one of the recommendations the report proposes to create the "**Local and Regional Government Advisory Group**" to strengthen the relationship between the UN and local and regional governments.
- The Global Taskforce assisted on the drafting of the Terms of Reference and nominated the 15 representatives of our constituency to the Advisory Group.

### **Our shared position on the Advisory Group:**

- Our constituency is convinced that we share feelings, we share solutions, with Our Common Agenda and we share the UN SG will to transform our systems to be more inclusive.
- Local and regional governments are allies to achieve our common agenda.

- We are aware of what mistrust in institutions is. The challenge we face is to rebuild this trust by bringing people closer to public institutions, through mechanisms that include young people, women and citizens in decision-making.
- Local and regional governments understand that trust is a mutual process. For this trust to be real and lasting, we must also involve our communities in global decision-making, with inclusive multilevel dialogues; with a renewed United Nations.
- Finally, one of the most resonant aspects of the 12 goals of the Common Agenda is its willingness to give voice and put the voiceless at the center.

### **Our constituency's contributions to Our Common Agenda**

- "Our Common Agenda" is a unique and groundbreaking report, and is built with a view to realizing the multilateral system that our communities are calling for.
- The report appeals directly to our constituency: it includes references to the recommendations provided by the UN Task Force on the Future of Cities and also to the proposals made during the UN global consultations<sup>75</sup> and the report of the "We the Peoples" consultation provided by the Igarapé Institute, which included recommendations from our collective.
- This is why we appreciate that the recommendations of the Global Taskforce to the UN Taskforce on the Future of Cities have been taken into account, and we applaud the courageous initiative to address inclusive multilateralism and the importance of voluntary local reports to achieve the 2030 Agenda.
- The proposal to hold an "Advisory Board on Local and Regional Governments" speaks directly to the yearnings of cities and regions around the world: to strengthen the relationship between the United Nations and local and regional governments.
- We recall the UN SG words on the fact that local and regional governments are carrying out "a small revolution: that of turning the relationship between local and regional governments and the UN into a structural relationship".
- We, the cities, local and regional governments from around the world, gathered in the GTF, are ready for this revolution, to make our way towards a better world.

### **Localizing the High-Impact Initiatives identified for the SDG Summit and the proposals of Our Common Agenda: for People, Planet and Government**

Twelve **high-impact initiatives** were selected by the United Nations for the SDG Summit in September to demonstrate that transformative progress is possible and to mobilize further leadership and investment for the SDGs between now and 2030. These initiatives tackle six major SDG transitions (Energy compacts, Food systems, transforming education, Nature driving economic transformation, Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, Digital Public Infrastructure), five critical means of implementation (SDG Localization, SDG Stimulus, Trade, Public Sector Capabilities, Data), and the transversal priority of gender equality, with a focus on eliminating violence against women.

The UN Secretary-General made different commitments in **Our Common Agenda**, and detailed proposals to achieve them through eleven Policy Briefs issued at the invitation of Member States to support the deliberations towards the Summit of the Future.

### **First Group of proposed themes: Local governments' targeted priorities for the Future of People**

- **Education**

In focus: Transforming Education (UNICEF, UNESCO, UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser on follow-up of the Transforming Education Summit)

Educating and learning cities and regions create comprehensive and universal public services for education and lifelong learning from a caring perspective, to support individual empowerment and social inclusion, economic development, cultural prosperity and sustainable development. Proximity to communities and local stakeholders places local and regional governments in a privileged role to detect and respond to the different needs of citizens, particularly those who have been traditionally excluded, and contribute to education objectives in such a way that no one is left behind. We call for increased efforts to improve recognition and measurement of our contribution to transform education, and in the development of multilevel partnerships for inclusive quality education.

- **Gender equality**

In focus: Spotlight Initiative on violence against women (Office of the UN Deputy-Secretary General with UN Women, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, IOM)

Our global Feminist Municipal Movement fosters caring cities and territories advancing a feminist agenda that guarantees equal rights for all, empowers local communities, and puts the well-being of people and our planet as the highest priority. Local and regional governments are decisive political actors in localizing all global agendas, addressing structural inequalities with human rights and care as cross-cutting levers. As part of the Global Alliance for Care, we call for including local and regional governments in global efforts – including the Spotlight initiative on violence against women – to lead a cultural transformation

and paradigm shift placing equality and climate justice at the centre of policy and action, from the local to the global level.

- **Human mobility**

In focus: Call to Local Action for Migrants and Refugees (together with IOM and UNHCR)

In the context of a growing but insufficient recognition of our role as local and regional governments in the global governance of migration and displacement, we shaped a renewed universal commitment on human mobility: the Lampedusa Charter. With human rights and peace as our horizon and through our joint Call to Local Action for Migrants and Refugees, we make human mobility work for all and foster social inclusion, with dignity at the center. We are committed to shifting the narrative around human mobility and ensuring the right to the city for all, and we urge all actors to move from border-centred approaches to people-centred and equality-driven vision of public service provision, to recognize the rights and contributions of all neighbors.

- **Social protection, equality and care**

In focus: Global Accelerator on jobs and social protection (ILO, UN Women, UNDP, FAO, UNICEF, WFP, World Bank)

We aim to transform the role of local and regional governments in regard to the future of work and social protection, beyond legislation and job provision, ensuring bright opportunities for all and acknowledging time as a currency and its lack of availability as a form of exclusion that must be addressed. We are committed to guaranteeing decent work and fair pay for all, based on the respect of the principles of subsidiarity, shared responsibilities and collaborative implementation, and entrepreneurship. In this sense and based on the initiatives and claims of our Feminist Municipal Movement, we call for a collective commitment, including through the Global Accelerator on jobs and social protection, to harness local public services to foster the rights of our communities and equality, establishing safety networks that protect and care for all populations, regardless of their status.

- **Youth and future generations**

In focus: Youth Engagement (UNICEF, other UN agencies and the upcoming Special Envoy for Future Generations)

We guarantee universal access to inclusive and accessible public services, taking into account the aspirations and needs of young people, and we ensure meaningful youth participation and engagement, with special attention paid to including the views of young people experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization. In particular, we create space for climate action, uplifting young peoples' knowledge and role as leaders, experts, and stakeholders in climate action and resilience. With the Youth Engagement proposals of the UN in mind, we call to integrate young people and future

generations' perspectives in decision-making processes at all levels and to empower them to thrive and take action in all governments and societies.

## **Second Group of proposed themes: Local governments' targeted priorities for the Future of Planet**

- **Biodiversity protection**

In focus: Nature driving economic transformation (UNEP with other UN agencies) and food systems transformation (FAO, WFP, UNEP, with other UN agencies)

Across the urban-rural continuum, we reintegrate urban systems into natural systems in ways that restore the vitality of both our cities and nature, and we co-create socially and environmentally just territories in which current and future generations and all life on earth can thrive. We urge for decoupling economic development from environmental degradation, and we emphasize the link between local public service provision and the right to food. Here, we must end malnutrition by transforming our food systems, so that our residents achieve their potential. Fundamentally new production, consumption, taxation, subsidization and investment patterns are required to reverse biodiversity loss and restore vital ecosystem services in order to sustain resilient economies and to give priority to the well-being of all. For this, we aim to ensure that local and regional governments play a key role within international policy processes related to economic transformation driven by nature and to the transformation of our food systems.

- **Energy**

In focus: Energy Compacts (UN-Energy)

As centers of consumption and production, local and regional governments are pivotal to reducing emissions and increasing energy efficiency, while ensuring sustainable access to energy for all. To scale up these efforts, we call for transcending dependence on natural resource extraction and carbon-intensive development. This requires investment in a just transition in which livelihoods, social protection and dignity are addressed in concert with new sustainable technologies and practices. With the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM) and other networks and initiatives, local governments are aligning with the Energy Compacts through catalytic partnerships to further advance globally-coherent and regionally-tailored increased access to clean and affordable energy, as well as solutions to foster a resilient and low-emission society.

- **Loss and damages**

In focus: Nature driving economic transformation (UNEP with other UN agencies)

Beyond the economic and social dimensions of losses and damages, we call for recognizing the social and ecological function of natural resources, land and

community climate action as commons and commoning practices that are key for solidarity and resilience. We call for the elevation of loss and damages and climate adaptation as a key priority for policy and funding, in order to directly reduce risks and vulnerabilities and build resilience for people and planet alike, especially for the urban poor. As local and regional governments, we have built alliances with diverse stakeholders to identify needs, and we provide public services that respond to the climate emergency. We are actively looking at the nexus between economic development and environmental protection, and are the level of government best placed to channel funding towards protecting human rights and nature's rights. We need to be engaged in the high-impact initiative on nature driving economic transformation, as the custodians of our local and global commons and the conveners of community action for ecological transition.

### **Third Group of proposed themes: Local governments' targeted priorities for the Future of Government**

- **Digital transformation in public infrastructure**

In focus: Global Digital Compact (UN)

Local and regional governments fulfill an important role in guaranteeing the rights of all people to participate in society and achieve their potential through inclusive and accessible digital transformation, including responsible use of artificial intelligence. We have a key role in fostering digital rights, through accessible digital public infrastructure, access to data and information, transparency and capacity building. We commit to continue to advocate for the inclusion of local and regional governments within digitalization policy processes, including a central role in the UN's Global Digital Compact.

- **Local emergency governance**

In focus: FutureGov (public sector capabilities) (UNDESA, UNDP) and the Emergency Platform (UN)

As we face increasingly overlapping global shocks and complex emergencies, we stand for broader recognition of what democratic legitimacy entails in the midst of emergency responses, for the strengthening of multilevel governance, and for renewed and feminist leadership at all levels of government. Building upon the findings of the Emergency Governance Initiative, we call for including local and regional governments in decision-making at all levels in the management of global complex emergencies, as key actors bringing the voices of populations into global conversations – including in the FutureGov high-impact initiative and in the Emergency Platform foreseen in Our Common Agenda.

- **Misinformation**

In focus: Information integrity on digital platforms (UN)

Free citizens will be the main engine of the social, political and economic changes that are essential to realize the 2030 Agenda and all global commitments for sustainable development. As local and regional governments intend to harness new technologies to systematically improve the quality of life for all and protect digital rights, we reaffirm the importance of free media, freedom of expression, agency and critical thinking in ensuring well-informed and empowered citizens and communities. We call for consultations with local and regional governments to build upon their progress in fostering open, accessible and verifiable information and data, therefore promoting education, communication and inclusion.

- **Urban SDG Finance**

In focus: SDG Stimulus (UNDESA)

Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires real commitment to, and radical collaboration for, subnational SDG financing through appropriate mechanisms and multilevel action. Building upon the work of the Global Commission for Urban SDG Finance and the Malaga Global Coalition for Municipal Finance, our constituency calls for reshaping global economic governance and global finance flows, by including subnational governments in global fora in meaningful ways. Incorporating local governments into the SDG Stimulus framework will ensure that the investments made address the concerns of local communities and foster development from the ground up, ultimately leading to more equitable outcomes and a stronger foundation for global sustainable development.

### **Embodying and shaping multilateralism 2.0: objectives and next steps for the Advisory Group of the Secretary-General on Local and Regional Governments**

- **Building on the work advanced through other existing mechanisms**

The Advisory Group will collaborate with various platforms and committees that already promote cooperation between local governments, Member States, and the United Nations system. These collaborations aim to elevate the priorities of local and regional governments and facilitate the implementation of sustainable development goals at the local level. They include the following:

- World Assembly on Local and Regional Governments
- Advisory Committee for Sustainable Urbanization
- United Nations Advisory Committee on Local Authorities (UNACLA)
- Local and Regional Governments Forum.

- **Objectives**

The Advisory Group of the Secretary-General on Local and Regional Governments has five specific objectives:

1. Enhance coordination and collaboration between local and regional governments and the UN system in policy priority areas. These include human rights, sustainable development, climate change and sustainable urbanization, and the impact of global crises;
2. Strengthen strategic engagement and contributions of local and regional governments in relevant intergovernmental UN-led processes, including through local and regional networks;
3. Encourage country-level cooperation between national, local, and regional governments, and UN country teams. In particular with a focus on local planning to inform national planning and budgeting processes;
4. Foster the narrative around localization to showcase local and regional governments' key role in recovering from global crises and advancing towards 2030;
5. Provide recommendations to strengthen local and regional governments and their associations' capacities, devolved authority, and financing to contribute to the global implementation, in particular the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda.

- **Deliverables**

The Advisory Group will work over a one-year period and meet with the Secretary-General at least on three occasions. It will provide the following deliverables to the United Nations Secretary-General, for his consideration:

1. Input for the Summit of the Future to ensure local and regional governments' dimensions are reflected in relevant preparatory processes.
2. A guidance note on modalities to enhance institutional mechanisms to strengthen the engagement of local and regional governments in intergovernmental processes, utilizing for this purpose the lead-up to the Summit of the Future.
3. A policy brief with strategic guidance and policy advocacy, to strengthen cooperation between national and local and regional governments, and the UN Country Teams, to advance national planning processes.
4. As a final deliverable, the Advisory Group will provide recommendations to the Secretary-General, to inform the deliberations of Member States in the lead-up to the Summit of the Future, with a view to advise on a United Nations global strategy for the engagement of local and regional governments. Including institutional mechanisms, intergovernmental processes, and partnership arrangements.

**Changing our world from the bottom-up: the Advisory Group of the United Nations Secretary-General on Local and Regional Governments and our commitment towards the Summit of the Future and the UN Pact for the Future**

The establishment of the Advisory Group of the United Nations Secretary-General on Local and Regional Governments, right after the 2023 SDG Summit and in the run-up to the 2024 Summit of the Future, is **an unprecedented achievement in the process of building a structural engagement of the local and regional government constituency with the United Nations and at intergovernmental processes.**

With the Summit of the Future and the UN Pact for the Future identified by the UN Secretary-General as crucial levers to bring about a new multilateral system that is inclusive, efficient and networked, **the Advisory Group must be seized as a space of the highest level for our constituency to bring its vision of how the multilateralism of the future must take shape**, while answering the call by the UN Secretary-General to define a “development to-do list” with the policies, budgets and investments needed to rescue the SDGs.

The Summit of the Future’s main outcome will be an intergovernmental negotiated, action-oriented Pact for the Future. It will comprise a chapeau and five chapters on i. sustainable development and financing for development; ii. international peace and security; iii. science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation; iv. youth and future generations; and v. transforming global governance.

The local and regional government constituency urges for mechanisms and processes to inform this Pact to make sure it reflects local communities’s aspirations and local and regional governments’ role, with the UCLG Pact for the Future of Humanity guiding our collective territorial contribution to shape and localize the UN Pact’s global commitments.