

## Narrative report: meeting of the UCLG working group on territorial prevention and crisis management

On November 29th, a meeting of the UCLG working group on territorial prevention and crisis management was held in Geneva. For this event were gathered representatives of the Global Alliance for Urban crises, of VNG International, of UN agencies, and of Malian, Ghanaian and Lebanese communities that have benefited from UCLG solidarity funds.



## 1<sup>st</sup> Session: presentation of the UCLG

### Jean-Baptiste Buffet, from the Policy and Advocacy Unit of the UCLG World Secretariat

Jean-Baptiste Buffet introduced his intervention by excusing Mrs. Emilia Saiz, Secretary General of UCLG, who could not be present, but who nevertheless wished to specify why this meeting was particularly important for the achievement of UCLG's objectives in the field of territorial crisis management and prevention:

- To reflect on how to link the very diverse experiences of the local level with international advocacy
- To underline the challenges around the necessary acceleration of the implementation of the global agendas for development, which requires the implementation of these agendas at the local level. The UCLG Learning modules notably promote this localization of agendas
- To emphasize solidarity between communities in the midst of multifaceted crises, in particular by thinking of ways to extend and deepen the mechanism of solidarity funds.
- Finally, to take advantage of the presence of UNDP, UN Habitat and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to develop coordination mechanisms between local authorities and the UN on the work carried out in the field.

### Filipe Decorte, UN-Habitat, Steering Committee of the GAUC (Global Alliance for Urban Crises)

Representing the GAUC and UN-Habitat, he recalled that cities are at the crossroad of many current crises: Covid-19, the economic and financial crises, climate, migration, etc. At the center of the crises that are sweeping the world, cities are increasingly central actors in the response to them. Their role is increasingly recognized in the implementation of global agendas (including the MDGs), and the fight against climate change. He then went back to the UCLG General Assembly and presented a short video on UCLG's support to cities facing crises

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKrN7RrUB1E>

### Jean-Baptiste Buffet

He reviews the work of UCLG and the different mechanisms at its disposal to strengthen the role of local authorities in the management and prevention of territorial crises

- Strengthening advocacy at the international level, with the United Nations, and on the ground with humanitarian actors. To structure this advocacy mission, UCLG created in 2017 five Policy Councils, composed of elected officials with a 3-year mandate. These councils provide direct recommendations to the organization and impact its work program. The council that deals with crises is the Council for Safer, Resilient and Sustainable Cities, able to cope with crises, chaired by San José, Geneva and Nouakchott. Three main priorities have emerged

from its work in recent months: making progress on the recognition of local authorities in crisis management, both on the ground and with the United Nations; strengthening the resilience of local public services in the face of financial, political and health crises; and strengthening the link between resilience and ecosystem protection by rethinking development models.

- For the coming months, UCLG has thought of a Future Pact, with a very strong focus on the protection of common goods, the notion of "care society" and resilience, with three priorities: population, the planet and the issue of governance.
- A rapprochement with the United Nations: for example, UCLG's Global Task Force has participated in the construction of the UN Common Agenda, which would not have been the case only 5 years ago. Globally, local authorities have taken a much more important place in the UN system, and the construction of this alliance in and with the UN system is progressing year after year
- The work of local authorities with humanitarian actors. For UCLG and the GAUC, it is a question of continuing to implement the new strategy launched by the Alliance with the humanitarian sector, knowing that close working and coordination relationships already exist. The challenge is to improve this collaboration for a more effective action in the fight against crisis risks.
- The next UCLG World Congress, in Daejeon, for which a Townhall process will be set up to involve civil society and local authorities through recommendations and work agendas over 3 to 6 years to promote a long-term vision, in which the concept of resilience will be central.
- Finally, the challenges of localizing the SDGs, in line with the Sendai Framework. The Learning team has a major role to play in this and is accelerating the implementation of its online courses for communities.

#### Simone Giovetti, Head of service at Cités Unies France

He mentions two crucial points on the role of the local authorities in the response to crises:

- The response of the GAUC to increase the capacity of coordination of the local governments and humanitarian actors when crises occur
- The strategy of the GAUC to train local authorities to be in dialog with the humanitarian system and the head development system

#### Daan Stelder, VNG International

He shows what has been done in the past to better the cooperation between local authorities and humanitarian actors, with 4 main objectives:

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- Engaging with key actors in the humanitarian sector on behalf of local authorities who are engaged in crisis management
- Recognition of the roles and responsibilities of local authorities in crisis management
- Strengthen the inclusion of local government perspectives and recognition of their competencies in the humanitarian response
- Supporting an effective and well-coordinated humanitarian response, more generally, with what UCLG can do

Since the International Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016, work has been done with UCLG to achieve these goals. Mr. Stelder highlights the work with the Alliance to establish a framework, or protocol of engagement, between local governments and humanitarian actors. This framework clearly defines the roles of local governments in a humanitarian situation, to avoid a very common source of confusion that arises from a misunderstanding of the competencies of public authorities and humanitarian actors and leads to undermine the effectiveness of humanitarian action on the ground.

The second initiative is the Guidance Note. The challenge of cooperation between local authorities and humanitarian actors is very complex, hence the guidance note, which provides local authorities with guidelines for working with humanitarians. Co-funded by Cités Unies France and UCLG, it explains the main issues of coordination and tells local authorities what they can expect when a crisis hits them, the basic functioning of the international humanitarian system, presents different perspectives. This is a modest project, a very small beginning, which calls for the development of a bibliography for local authorities in the coordination with humanitarians. This work will be done with UCLG Learning, for now we have training modules for crisis management, in particular the Covid crisis.

Here is a video that introduces a new tool: the UCLG solidarity fund  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYLzr29aBdE>

The solidarity funds, in which many communities around the world participate, aim to make the recipient cities more resilient, more resistant to disasters. And even with small funds it is possible to increase the capacity of cities, to empower them, more able to work with humanitarian actors. We will see concretely what it does in Ghana, Mali and Lebanon.

### Filipe Decorte, UN-Habitat, Steering Committee of the GAUC (Global Alliance for Urban Crises)

This is the first meeting of the Alliance since Covid, but we have continued to take actions to improve cooperation between local authorities and humanitarian actors, bringing to the table all actors involved in crisis prevention and management, to achieve a better common understanding of how to respond to crises.

We need a common understanding, a common language, so we created an "urban profiling", so that everyone is on the same page. This tool has been used particularly in

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the Middle East, but this notion of urban profiling is also being adopted at the global level. It promotes a multi-sectorial analysis to understand people, communities, but also the city in general. It is hoped that this tool will be democratized in the years to come. You can find below an example of a guide for Urban profiling in the Turkish context:

<https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/12/2-reslog-kit-profil-yontemleri-eng-online.pdf>

Once we have a better common understanding, we need to better coordinate between actors, which is a challenge. UN Habitat is trying to get the protocol of engagement between local authorities and humanitarian actors adopted. We are now in the final phase of adoption of the document by the humanitarian system, which is a great step forward. Around the response to Covid, we have seen a better commitment on the part of local authorities, but now it must be recognized at the global level.

The notion of localization in the humanitarian response is taking ground. It is another big commitment of the humanitarian system, the UN and the main donors. Localization used to mean engagement close to the ground. Now, this notion automatically takes into account local authorities.

The role of local authorities is increasingly recognized (in the Covid crisis). Some problems are nevertheless recurrent:

- How to articulate the local response with the national level of government? This articulation is essential, but it is not always smooth
- It is important to ensure that local governments have the capacity to do their part and that it is not the external humanitarian and international actors who will do all the work
- Access to finance is a major issue, especially with Covid, with migration, demographic shocks, energy and water challenges. The solidarity fund is a step in the right direction
- How can we better manage displacement? Funding is already available to enable local authorities to deal with population displacement

Many tools have been developed, but now they need to be applied, and knowledge needs to be made available. We must be able to make the knowledge developed at the global level accessible at the local level. We have made progress in the humanitarian system, but the Alliance must have a greater presence in Geneva, to anchor itself in the humanitarian ecosystem.

### Synne Bergby, UN-Habitat

In recent years, there has been a deepening of research and knowledge, including feedback from UCLG. Mrs. Bergby underlines the need to establish a Secretariat of the Alliance, for which Geneva has proposed, to ensure continuity of the activities of the Alliance and to have a physical space, which will allow to better collaborate with the Geneva Cities Hub and to centralize and translate the numerous knowledge needed by local authorities. Having a place of reference, with an online presence, will make it easier

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to disseminate knowledge, concepts and methodologies and to make them more accessible.

### Jorn-Casper Owre, Senior Advisor to the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Not much funding is going to local authorities, we need to fix that, and we need more contribution of local authorities on emergency plans to inform and evaluate, understand what works where and adapt the emergency plans according to the place. We should stimulate the work with meteorological institutes, which allow us to better understand how to implement programs that promote climate action. We seek to provide alternatives to displacements by increasing the resilience of the territories.

### Simone Giovetti

Presents the solidarity fund, in support of the TCs, which can be easily activated.

3 major steps remain to be taken:

- UCLG is often there when there is a crisis, it is part of the Alliance, so we can coordinate to improve this cooperation on the ground
- Training is a complicated issue because it must be modulated for each territory. We work with UCLG Learning to improve the knowledge of local authorities and the humanitarian sector
- Politically, the Barcelona secretariat can support the GAUC

Question and answer session

## **2<sup>nd</sup> session: The perspective of humanitarian organizations and UN agencies on working with local governments in urban areas**

### Sadi Kanaan, Chair of the UCLG Working Group, Co-Chair of the Policy Council on Resilient Cities and member of the Executive Council of the City of Geneva

Geneva is an ideal city for meetings like this, with a large concentration of organizations. The city is for example the organizational center of the UN. The heart of the international system today is the States, and even now, local authorities are not yet sufficiently taken into account in international negotiations, even though they are the closest to the people, the most capable of judging if measures are relevant and applicable. For Covid, cities have not been consulted in the vast majority of cases, as in Switzerland, even though the social situation has deteriorated for many citizens. It is important that the central state and the humanitarian system work actively with local authorities, which is why Geneva participates and is committed to UCLG, in particular in the working group for safer, more resilient and sustainable cities. In particular, it participates in the solidarity fund that helps populations in Lebanon, Mali and Ghana, whose representatives will present the projects that this fund has made possible.

### Jean-Baptiste Buffet



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This is a special session, with 3 strategic speakers, which will address the issue of increasing the work between local governments and humanitarian actors. We will deepen the issues discussed in the morning: how to strengthen cooperation with national governments, how to address protocol engagement to raise awareness among local governments and international partners, how to better implement the recognition of the role of local governments?

Ronald Jackson, Head of the disaster risk reduction, for the recovery and building resilience department of the PNUD

Focus on strengthening the resilience of urban territories and GLR capacities to respond to disasters. Covid has reinforced the centrality of local governments in disaster management. Two new dimensions have added complexity: it is a crisis that has affected all areas, all communities; and risks are becoming interconnected and systemic, and this trend will only strengthen in the coming decades. We must therefore invest in disaster risk reduction, and not only in emergency humanitarian response, to prevent disasters and their effects.

A few critical gaps: a lack of concerted focus on risk development interferes at a local level; addressing all dimensions of resilience, in a social, economic and environmental tandem; building capacities for managing systemic risk (all of them) as a single and centralized intervention. Special attention to the most marginalized sectors of society, the poor, the vulnerable, and the disenfranchised is necessary to build resilience and secure development.

UNDP has been working with the GLR to strengthen risk management. Guided by the lessons of the past decade, we have concluded that the best way to manage humanitarian needs is to reduce risk through sustained investments in risk reduction, reorienting current socio-economic investments. It is also necessary to place the humanitarian system within a comprehensive risk reduction continuum. UNDP's approach is multi-land and multi-hazard (climate, health, security, human rights)

Risk informing development is a governance process, with the aim to ensure the systemic integration of risk consideration in the development policy and planning. However, an adequate attention has been accorded internationally to addressing systemic risk at a local and national level. In response to the growing demand, UNDP has conducted an analytical review of a decade of work on urban resilience, with some strategic priorities: focusing on neglected areas where capacity gaps exist; strengthening urban governance by reducing the disconnection with national policies; addressing the specific needs and vulnerabilities of the most marginalized sectors of urban communities; increasing the capacity of cities with the fewest resources to manage multidimensional risks; and enhancing the potential for investment in technological and digital innovation.

In conclusion, the UNDP recognizes that immediate post-disaster context, including humanitarian support, offers an important entry point to our objectives, and an opportunity to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The current systemic crises demand that we cooperate with all the partners, the UCLG, the humanitarian actors...

Ela Serdaroglu – IFRC (International Federation of the Red Cross)

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The Red Cross is the largest humanitarian network in the world, present in most countries. Their strength has been working with communities and national governments. But working in an urban context led to re-evaluate this method, and the place given to local governments, because in a large crisis and in a complex urban fabric, it is difficult to define the roles at the national level. That's one of the lessons of the last few years, especially from covid-19. In the study "Strategy 2030 on working in urban contexts", partnerships at the local level are well emphasized.

Some key points on the latest learnings;

We have identified the main actors in the Covid crisis. First are the national governments, and second are the municipal authorities. Our national federations are supporting local authorities to coordinate projects with the national level, which is new. They also express their intention to play a more important role in the future, but this rapprochement must be based on mutual trust, which is not easy to build in a crisis situation. The main recommendation of this study is to build and strengthen cooperation with local authorities, as they are key interlocutors in the response to urban crises.

What challenges?

- The understanding of interventions as part of an urban system as a system is different from the classical humanitarian conception of projects and activities
- Changing roles: the Red Cross is traditionally a service provider, but as it becomes more embedded in the urban space, it must assume a coordinating role, bringing the voice of vulnerable communities to the table, for example, which requires an adjustment
- Working in a complex urban context requires breaking the silos and taking distance from the logos, in order to work together in a true spirit of partnership.

To overcome these challenges, the Red Cross has consulted with all 192 national federations to scale up urban action. This will be followed by an action plan. It is hoped that this resolution can be passed into the agenda in June 2022, which will give the structure and legitimacy to push for much more ambitious urban resilience programs.

Winston Chang, Head of the United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)

A quick review of the state of coordination between local governments and the humanitarian sector from the UN perspective, and the main challenges in this relationship

OCHA's main message to governments is one of localization. Here is a video made in response to the August 4 Beirut explosion and how OCHA participated in the humanitarian response. The global network sends rescue teams to help governments.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAR7bWR8ALY>

For many international responders, national governments have to take quick responses to tackle the disasters. If they cannot, they have to inform the international community where are the areas that need help, in particular the OCHA. Another question is the ability of the international community to enter the country : the international



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community has to be informed of the conditions of entrance, and respect them (vaccination, quarantine, etc.). The key point: we will support the national communities, who are in charge. The international community does not run the response or replace the government, it only strengthen the national or response

For the local governments, the OCHA recommends to adopt globally accepted standards in response plans, and to engage with international networks such as INSARAG, that allow to share experience and expertise.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> session: case study with communities in Cités Unies France's partner countries that have been able to respond to a crisis or are currently mobilized in response to a crisis**

#### Rob Metz, mayor of Soest, Netherlands

Local authorities do not have to replace the work of humanitarian organizations: they are part of a broader equation and bring distinct added value on the table. The UCLG solidarity fund provides a concrete and functional way to do this, as it manages the solidarity between local authorities. The covid crisis has shown the efficiency of this network, which has quickly mobilized meaningful resources under the leadership of Cités Unies France to help Ghana and Mali. This project has been possible by connecting with the already existing link between VNG International and Kumasi for five years.

Video showing an example of a solidarity fund, in Indonesia:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93NgeiPKuAI>

The objective of this session is to learn more about how cities prepare, react and rebuild in the face of crises from specific cases of cities that have benefited from UCLG's solidarity fund.

#### Kumasi, Ghana

The city has a population of 2.3 million, 52% of whom are women, which makes gender issues of great importance. It is the historical industrial and commercial heart of the country, with a lot of economic activity. About 90% of businesses are unregistered, so the income is directly linked to the economic activity, without intermediary of the State (taxes, contributions, aid, etc.). The activity attracts migrants, so poverty and precariousness also increase. When the Covid arrived, the contaminations went very fast, because of the migrations. The city closed, and the poorest could not provide themselves with food or hygiene products, and not enough water to respect the sanitary protocols. The closure of schools and confinement led to reproductive health problems, with many early pregnancies. Lack of Internet access prevented most businesses from switching to online activity; unattended stockpiles of goods became the target of many thefts.

Lack of registration of businesses was a problem, as it was impossible for local authorities to contact or assist them when the need was great. The public sector also suffered from the crisis and the lockdowns. Another problem was the lack of clarity in the distribution of competencies between elected officials at different levels, which affected the speed of response. Their incomes declined, which affected their ability to provide public services.

The challenge was to see how to prevent the consequences of this crisis, prepare immediate responses to it and anticipate the reconstruction of the city's economy.

#### The Malian communities

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In Mali, five municipalities have been identified as direct beneficiaries of the program, but the Association of Municipalities of Mali (AMM) has also deployed a number of actions for the benefit of other communities. There is a multidimensional, institutional and security crisis in this country, to which Covid has been added. The challenge is enormous for local elected officials, including for the communities receiving aid. Three of them are in the "red zones" marked by insecurity, where communities are extremely precarious and cannot provide basic social services.

The actions focused on 2 points: awareness raising on Covid and training actions by bringing together the actors of the same locality (local elected officials, health personnel, civil society, state representatives).

This project drew the attention of the central government to the space that communities offer in terms of awareness raising (invitation of the WMA to the consultation committee) and attracted other international partners, notably VNG International, to accompany communities, the point of application of health and development policies. In the heart of Mali, during the security crisis, a water tower destroyed by terrorists was rehabilitated.

Local actors understand the need to be at the heart of the response to the pandemic, which is taking hold over time. Today, the challenge is to perpetuate these actions, duplicate them in other communities, and make local elected officials key players in the prevention and management of this crisis.

### Maroun Antoun, mayor of El-Qrayeh, Lebanon

The current crisis is the most severe in Lebanon's history. There is a deep economic depression, a deterioration of public finances, a depreciation of the currency, a galloping inflation. The explosion of the port of Beirut accentuates the catastrophe, as does the Covid pandemic. 90% of the population lives below the poverty line, there are shortages of water, electricity, medicine, oil, and the banking, hospital and education systems are collapsing. There are also 1.5 million Syrian refugees in the country.

Faced with this crisis, communities find themselves alone. Al-Qrayeh suffers from the lack of means necessary to face these crises. The middle classes, once 80% of the Lebanese, have joined the poor. The local authorities find themselves obliged to invent solutions on a day-to-day basis, with financial resources dependent on direct taxes (which are no longer paid) and state subsidies, paid partially and with great delay. Despite this stagnation, initiatives such as the solidarity fund remind communities that they have not been abandoned. El-Qrayeh is a model to follow, with a citizen's consultation committee that has undertaken interviews with segments of society to identify the most important educational needs

Results: a church-owned space was fitted out and equipped to serve as a school after almost two years without classes for children, and students were hired to provide specialized classes for the children.

### Exercise of the UCLG Learning Team

The UCLG Learning team then implemented an exercise on crisis prevention and response actions. In this exercise, depending on the crisis, the participants have to choose the actions that can be implemented to rebuild the territory after the disaster, and the measures that could have been applied before the crisis, to prevent the crisis

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from happening, or at least mitigate its effects. Depending on the crisis (armed conflict, pandemic, financial crisis, flood, fire or earthquake), the solutions to be implemented before and after the disaster are not exactly the same. The group was divided into three groups, for each community present at the meeting that had benefited from a Solidarity Fund, and the exercise was adapted each time to the type of disaster that the communities experienced and to the responses that were provided, in particular with the UCLG Solidarity Funds. Thus, one group focused on the multifaceted crisis affecting Lebanese communities, and two others studied the impact of the Covid crisis, respectively in Kumasi, Ghana, and in Malian communities in general.

### Discussion about the 3 cases

According to the Kumasi representative, the national governments should elaborate a policy framework to respond to crises. This framework clearly defines the structures and the systems, the kind of capacity and skills required to respond to disasters, and the resources that are needed to really help to reduce risks. In most of the cases, the policy framework tend to be there, the systems and structures are mostly clearly defined, but the capacity and the resources required to facilitate implementation is the main challenge faced.

Going forward, we should look at how we can improve availability of resources, capability and skills locally, nationally and regionally to deal with these disasters. And to look how we can align all of these policy frameworks from the international to the local level, so that there is a rapid response going through the entire system. This harmonization requires creating a generic framework for all kinds of disasters.

In Lebanon, the first thing to do is to strengthen the human capacities of the communities through training, such as the Capacity Building Program, to strengthen the financial resources, which are essential for the realization of the projects, and to work on the cooperation with the different levels of government: the work at the local level is essential in order to better understand the needs of the populations and to establish a relationship of trust with them.

For the representative of Mali, local elected officials must be made aware of their roles and responsibilities in crisis prevention and management at the local level. He emphasized that security crises generally start at the local level before spreading to the national level. The training of local elected officials is therefore essential to contain crises, especially since in Mali, competencies in the area of health have been transferred to the communities. He recommends that local authorities be proactive in security and crisis prevention in general, without waiting for the State to intervene.

### Conclusion, by Simone Giovetti

We need to establish this kind of meetings on a regular basis, perhaps once a year, to meet with the local authorities around the world, the humanitarian sector, the development UN Agency, and build with them on a daily basis. This needs efforts, and we should keep insisting to organize this kind of meeting once a year, with even more participants if Covid allows us.

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Here are some important things we agreed to do and we should engage for:

- As a working group, we need to work more with the GAUC, as a policy field of action. The goal to reach is very important, because the final objective is to change the system in its format at a very global level. If we succeed, the place of local powers will be more important and we will have a better attention from donors, to adapt the process and ease the transfer, especially to small localities and vulnerable communities. We the solidarity fund, we are showing the example, and we should bring that example to the highest point.
- Learning is part of our job, with the Learning department at UCLG. We start with small steps as a working group, with editing this guide, but we need to go further, plan different sessions of Training of Trainers (ToT) to improve the cooperation with the humanitarian system and better prepare the local authorities.
- The solidarity fund initiative also needs to continue. They are little initiatives with small budget, but this meeting has shown how productive they are, with a practical and political success. We can expect that the strength and efficiency of the funds we are carrying will attract more local authorities and donors.
- Finally, the policy council, a consultation tool at the UCLG level, has this main question: how better help, when crises occur? How to improve the capacities of local authorities to manage crises? This point is currently not really on the agenda of this council, as it should. The last point we have not talked about is making a link with the other policy councils of UCLG, we need to establish a bridge, and bring on board all the mayors, the officials that are involved in those policy councils to help us to think how to do better.

### Next events:

- May 2022, the UN Platform for Risk reduction in Indonesia, exactly at the same time that we will inaugurate the memorial of Palu that a solidarity funds helped to build.
- The World Congress of UCLG of 2022 in Daejeon, South Korea