

**Economic and Social Council**Distr.: General  
26 January 2017

Original: English

---

**Committee of Experts on Public Administration****Sixteenth session**

New York, 24-28 April 2017

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

**Ensuring effective implementation of the Sustainable****Development Goals: leadership, action and means****Understanding the needs of local authorities and  
communities and supporting and equipping them for the  
implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals****Note by the Secretariat**

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration the paper prepared by Committee member Najat Zarrouk in collaboration with Jean-Pierre Elong Mbassi of United Cities and Local Governments of Africa. The content of the paper and views expressed therein are those of the authors and do not imply any expression of opinion on the part of the United Nations.

---

\* E/C.16/2017/1.



## **Understanding the needs of local authorities and communities and supporting and equipping them for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals**

### *Summary*

Local authorities everywhere are no longer merely service providers, but also complex systems that can play a central role in an interdependent world. Their role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1) is critical. The 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the New Urban Agenda, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), are all closely related to the day-to-day responsibilities of subnational governments, for example in combating poverty and hunger, providing access to basic services, fighting inequalities, building peaceful and inclusive societies, protecting human rights and promoting gender equality. The complexity of local authorities is compounded by the fact that the Sustainable Development Goals, while universal, are not mandatory. Each country, and within each country each local or regional government, must examine its needs and priorities in relation to the Goals and in consideration of national sustainable development targets.

In the present paper, the authors recall that local development continues to encounter a multitude of obstacles, multidimensional challenges and constraints, some of which are structural and some cyclical, while others are new and emerging challenges that will have to be reckoned with. These include questions of intergovernmental relations arising from differences in historical context, the recognition and understanding of the value of decentralization processes, administrative structures and arrangements for the distribution of powers, representation and participation and resource-sharing. The availability of the necessary skills and attention to capacity development at the local level is essential given that it is at that level that the impact of any decentralization process is determined. To that, one could add the need to anchor democracy and good public governance at the local level and to attend to the important challenges of urbanization.

The authors conclude with a call for a series of measures that could be considered in the implementation of global commitments at the local level. In the view of the expert, these include moving gradually towards a smaller and more strategic national State, supporting the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, clearly defining roles and responsibilities, providing local authorities with adequate access to resources and strengthening their administrative capacity, and promoting the coherence of initiatives in support of the implementation of the Goals at the local level.

## **I. Decentralization and local governance: political and administrative decisions key to the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals**

[Original: French]

1. Because all development is local, decentralization, as an expression and method of local governance, is of great importance, especially in the current global context. The term encompasses the multitude of historical, sociological, ethnic, cultural, political, institutional, legal, territorial, semantic, administrative and managerial realities that shape and define both the environments and the political and institutional decisions of States. However, their democratic configurations, their mechanisms for taking public action and their public policies and decentralization in local governance are key political and administrative factors for development in many countries.

2. Indeed, local authorities everywhere are no longer merely service providers. They are also highly complex systems that can play a central role in an interdependent world. Most of the problems in the world today can therefore be found in small communities or in parts of a country. Global economic, political and cultural processes are now local and have growing local impacts. The local level is not only about meeting needs but also about the relationship between the people and the land, and between democracy and development.

3. We should nevertheless first acknowledge that not all Member States are in favour of decentralized governments or local and regional governments. Since local governance is not the same as decentralization, some States have decentralized governments with strong local and regional governments, whereas others are highly centralized and have no local or regional governments. In either scenario, local governance arrangements require local interests, problems, needs, means and resources to be addressed, discussed and negotiated. If the goal is to achieve sustainable local development, any decentralization process that seeks to enhance and strengthen local governance would require the creation of a favourable, enabling and facilitating environment to allow local and regional governments to have the legitimacy they need, to act in an atmosphere of trust, to have genuine local autonomy and to be genuine actors in the management of local public affairs, in a spirit of strong collaboration with central State institutions as well as other actors and stakeholders. Local and regional governments will then be able to respond to the needs and aspirations of citizens and communities while coping with their difficulties and challenges.

4. The Sustainable Development Goals, while universal, are not mandatory and they do take into account specific countries. Every country, and certainly every local and regional government within each country, must consider its needs and priorities in respect of each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the 169 targets, tailor the targets to its own situation, and adopt a national development programme that includes the selected Goals. For example, what role can a local government play in a landlocked country where the priority is to strive to incorporate the issue of oceans into its development programme? What role can local and regional governments play in countries in post-conflict situations, where the entire apparatus

of the State is to be rebuilt? How should power and resources be shared in countries in democratic transition?

5. In parallel, the achievement of most of the Sustainable Development Goals and the related targets remains dependent on the existence of local and regional governments that can effectively and equitably deliver essential public and community services, such as education, health care, water, sanitation and public order, or create a favourable and attractive environment for local economic development, especially for microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises, and encourage their formalization (Goal 8). There are several countries where local and regional governments play a key role in that area, in particular in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa, thereby amplifying their role in the achievement of the Goals.

6. Consequently, it is important for the international community, Member States and other actors and stakeholders to understand the needs of local and regional governments in order to support, empower, equip and transform them so that they can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in each State Member of the United Nations. The present paper endeavours to provide some answers to these issues.

## **II. A constrictive environment and multidimensional challenges**

7. The world today, as described in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is characterized by huge sustainable development challenges. At the local level, local governance and decentralization, as integral parts of any process of local development, continue to encounter a multitude of obstacles and as many multidimensional challenges and constraints that must be addressed in order to avoid the shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals and promote effective and efficient achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals within the allotted time frame. Some are structural and some cyclical, while others are new and emerging challenges that will have to be reckoned with.

### **Challenges in relations between States and local and regional governments**

8. Despite ongoing legislative efforts and electoral processes in most Member States, relations between States and local and regional governments encounter many challenges, including historical context and capitalization; the vision, recognition, understanding, perception and upgrading of these processes; the territorial architecture and its consistency and stability, a good balance between the various levels of government and the people; constitutional guarantees, the articulation of principles and their translation into reality; the legal framework; processes for appointing and electing local and regional officials; the distribution and targeted strengthening of jurisdiction since that is holds the key to the outcome, effectiveness and impact of any decentralization process; the sharing and allocation of resources of all kinds, including with regard to official development assistance and international cooperation; relationships with State representatives at the subnational level; the existence of structured inter-institutional dialogue between actors and

levels of government; performance oversight, follow-up, evaluation and measurement modalities; and support for anchoring good governance at the local or regional level.

9. The building and consolidation of a State and making it resilient require the building of a State in a diverse but unified nation. Decentralization therefore means profoundly and completely transforming a State, its power, its authority and its way of managing its people and its territory. One example is the process of decentralization in Morocco and the changes that have taken place in the country since independence. The current phase involves introducing advanced regionalization as part of the implementation of the 2011 Constitution.

### **Challenges of anchoring democracy, organization and good public governance at the local level**

10. Apart from taking into account the specific context in every country, the question of decentralization encounters another set of challenges intrinsic to local and regional governments, such as the nature of their leadership; the existence of a genuine vision and strategic planning across their territory; the entrenchment of a culture of citizen participation and genuine participatory democracy; an ability to adapt to a multi-stakeholder and multilevel governance context; the mainstreaming of the principles of good governance and concerns relating to diversity, gender, disability, minorities, risk and resilience; the role of information and communications technologies; the structure, organization, management and operation of local governance in terms of institutions, services, systems, structures, machinery and processes, behaviours, practices and relationships, internal communications and relationships with the environment; and the role of partnership, cooperation and networking in local vision and governance.

11. The key challenges for local and regional governments, especially in African and other developing countries, include weaknesses and limitations of local public administration, deficits and poor governance of local institutions and structures, insufficient or non-existent local public services, and the positioning and situation of the human capital that is supposed to translate laws and infrastructure into reality and transform the vision and political agenda of local elected officials into actual development activities.

### **Impact of decentralization and local governance on land-use planning, the people's living conditions and sustainable development**

12. The process of establishing, supporting and shoring up decentralization and local governance is by definition political, complex, risky and, above all, expensive. Strong local government should be viewed by all State bodies, without exception, as key to a country's stability and the sustainable development of society. However, many decentralization-related reforms remain the preserve of central governments, which retain authority over the decentralized entities. This is often indicative of the sort of decentralization that is only achieved through laws, elections, procedures and strict oversight, and merely amounts to importing foreign models, often with

external technical assistance, without regard for the reality on the ground, without a participatory and inclusive approach, and above all without operational continuity, much less capitalization.

13. A public policy on sustainable decentralization must be evaluated on the basis of its impact, not only on national and territorial development in terms of land use, infrastructure, facilities and services, competitiveness and attractiveness, but also on sustainable development. The role played by decentralization in the success of local governance must be an integral part of any State-adopted decentralization policy, it must be assessed using effectiveness, efficiency and impact appraisal tools, and must be periodically evaluated as a public policy mobilizing public efforts and funds.

14. Despite these institutional and practical bottlenecks, and in spite of the upheavals conflicts and flows of displaced people of the last few years, it is worth emphasizing the significant progress made in the areas of decentralization and local governance throughout the world, and the existence of many good practices worthy of being disseminated and shared. In the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries, for instance, local and regional government spending accounts for approximately one third of public spending and approximately 70 per cent of public investment.<sup>1</sup> In Africa, where these processes are designed as policy choices that support democratization and local and territorial development, the conditions are very favourable for the entrenchment of decentralization in the political culture, with significant advances and promising trends having been observed.<sup>2</sup>

### **The challenge of rapid urbanization**

15. A major global problem, urbanization is currently the greatest challenge for States, local and regional governments and other actors involved in the development process. Among its causes are demographic transitions and shifts, societal changes, climate change, economic and technological progress, migratory movements, and the impacts and effects of crises and conflicts.

16. Since 2014, 54.1 per cent of humankind has been living in urban areas, compared to 30 per cent in the 1950s, and estimates are as high as 60 per cent for 2030 and 66 per cent for 2050. This is a global shift that of course brings with it enormous benefits and opportunities. However, it is also a model which will have major consequences for the environment and social development. States are the first to be affected, but it is in fact local and regional governments which are on the front lines and therefore more affected. They are in direct daily contact with citizens, communities, businesses, minorities and refugees, among others. Urbanization poses

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Sharing Responsibilities and Resources among Levels of Government: Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals”, conference paper by Paul Smoke and Hamish Nixon prepared for the fifteenth session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 2016. Available at the following location: <http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN95873.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> United Cities and Local Governments, *Decentralization and local democracy in the world*, Africa chapter (2008). Available at the following location: [http://www.cities-localgovernments.org/gold/Upload/gold\\_report/02\\_africa\\_en.pdf](http://www.cities-localgovernments.org/gold/Upload/gold_report/02_africa_en.pdf).

multidimensional problems for local and regional governments which are often unaware of these problems, or lack the resources and capabilities needed to resolve them.

17. The rapid urbanization of many cities in developing countries, particularly in Africa, has also led to the growth of slums and substandard housing, obliging municipalities to act and interact at various levels simultaneously: they must develop strategic urban plans for infrastructure, public services and urban transport, make cities sustainable, prevent the growth of slums and work with slum-dwellers to improve their living conditions and provide them with minimum basic services, to cite just a few examples.<sup>3</sup> In essence, it is in cities that the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost.<sup>4</sup>

### **III. Involvement and responsibility of local and regional governments in global agendas**

#### **Promotion of an inclusive and participatory approach at all levels among all actors and stakeholders**

18. On 25 September 2015, the States Members of the United Nations adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals comprising the post-2015 development agenda which, to be a success at the local level, will require an unwavering, universal commitment to local governance.

19. It should be recalled that local and regional governments were not truly involved in the Millennium Development Goals negotiation and implementation processes, although many areas covered by those Goals fall under the authority of local. The lack of local ownership of the Goals and the insufficiency of local resources to achieve them were identified as being among the major weaknesses of the Goals.

20. Taking into account the lessons learned from that experience, and the changes and transitions that have taken place in the international community, including in the area of democracy and local governance, thanks to the commitment and mobilization of local and regional government networks, stakeholders prepared, negotiated and adopted this agenda on the basis of unprecedented levels of global consultation and dialogue. Their participatory and inclusive approach represented a substantial achievement for all of them, encapsulated in the new slogan “Leave no one behind”. Several initiatives have helped to entrench this inclusive approach in the preparation and negotiation process in support of local and regional governments. One such initiative was the establishment of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments for the Post-2015 Development Agenda towards Habitat III, which played a key role in mobilizing, informing and educating local

<sup>3</sup> United Cities and Local Governments, “Sustainable Development Goals: What Local Governments Need to Know” (2015). Available at the following location: [https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/the\\_sdgs\\_what\\_localgov\\_need\\_to\\_know\\_0.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/the_sdgs_what_localgov_need_to_know_0.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Organization, report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, “A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development” (2013), p. 20.

and regional governments, their associations and urban communities to participate in the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The process led not only to the inclusion of local issues and local actors in the sustainable development agenda, but also to the adoption of Goal 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), the participation of local and regional governments in joint stewardship of the localization of the Goals, as well as the promotion of cities' visibility at global conferences held in 2015 and 2016. Moreover, the members of United Cities and Local Governments have committed to contributing actively to the new global partnership between international institutions, national governments, local and regional governments, civil society and the private sector, and to using the international platforms to promote local action as an engine for development.

## **All the Sustainable Development Goals are local**

### **Sustainable Development Goals**

21. A renewed global partnership calls for the genuine involvement, accountability and participation of local and regional governments in this new inclusive global process, in close collaboration with the Governments of Member States, and alongside other actors and stakeholders. Local and regional governments, being key players owing to their roles, responsibilities, powers and proximity to citizens, local communities and the business community, are heavily involved in the pursuit of all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, for example in combating poverty and hunger throughout the world, ensuring access to basic services, addressing inequalities, building peaceful and inclusive societies, protecting human rights, implementing gender equality and establishing prosperity and peace worldwide.

22. Sustainable Development Goal 11 is the only Goal based on a subnational approach, and represents an unprecedented advance towards the recognition of the role that local and regional governments have to play in the Agenda. Local and regional governments have a part to play in achieving all of its targets: strategic and participatory planning, the establishment of sustainable linkages between urban, suburban and rural zones, access to housing, public transport, the protection and safeguarding of the world's cultural and natural heritage, climate change, natural disasters, the creation of green spaces and safe public spaces, and the construction of sustainable and resilient buildings using local materials.

23. As public institutions, they are also involved in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16: combating all forms of violence, particularly in urban spaces, reducing corruption and unethical practices, establishing effective, accountable and transparent institutions, entrenching dynamic, open, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making processes, ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms.



## **New Urban Agenda**

24. Alongside other levels of government and stakeholders, local and regional governments are involved in and committed to the entire New Urban Agenda that was the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). Some national and local governments have even enshrined principles known as the “right to the city” in their legislation, political declarations and charters, thus creating a new vision of cities for all, where all present and future inhabitants are able, without any form of discrimination, to live in and make cities that are fair, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient and sustainable.

25. The entire text of the New Urban Agenda engages and affects local and regional governments as hubs and drivers of balance and sustainable urban and territorial development that is integrated at all levels. They are fully involved in the process, starting with the transparent and accountable definition and implementation of inclusive and effective urban legislation and policies on sustainable urban development, participatory planning and management, coordination, cooperation in the provision of social and basic services for all, the interface between all relevant stakeholders, and consideration of the Agenda.

## **Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

26. Local and regional governments and the most vulnerable cities are often on the front lines when it comes to preventing, adapting to or combating the effects of climate change, and raising the awareness of the population from the bottom of the income scale. They have thus rightly grasped the universal scope of the Paris Agreement, which set up an architecture for the new climate regime. They have also grasped the decisive progress that has been made thanks to the Agreement in raising awareness of the shared destiny of the whole of humankind in the face of the negative impacts that have already been generated and of the risk of further climate disruptions and related disasters if climate warming is not kept below 2°C and preferably 1.5°C by the year 2100.<sup>5</sup> They have also supported and associated themselves with all the commitments made, which would be contingent on broad mobilization, advocacy, exchange of best practices, establishment of partnerships, and resource mobilization.

27. Regarding implementation, local and regional governments are affected by all the provisions of the Paris Agreement, especially in the areas of mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage, financing, technology development and transfer, transparency in operations and support, capacity-building or follow-up and evaluation mechanisms.

---

<sup>5</sup> Cotonou Declaration adopted as the outcome of the work of the African Cities and Territories Preparatory Forum for the twenty-second Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, on the theme “African cities and territories, unavoidable stakeholders in the implementation of the international agenda on climate change”, held in Cotonou, Benin, from 8 to 10 September 2016.

28. In short, the new global agendas are closely linked to the everyday work and concerns of local and regional governments. Beyond implementation, local and regional governments are responsible for policies, are vectors of change and represent the level of government best placed to tie the global Goals to local communities and realities on the ground, just as “cities and territories are where women and men, girls and boys, live, where they work to create their livelihoods and where dreams are made. They are where poverty and inequalities are tackled, where health and education services are provided, where ecosystems are protected, and human rights must be guaranteed”.<sup>6</sup>

#### **IV. Main reform pathways to move from global commitments to the implementation and achievement of results at the local level**

29. Public institutions remain key to maintaining peace, security, order and political stability in order to safeguard the public interest and create favourable conditions for economic growth and social cohesion. Nevertheless, the State, in the conventional political and institutional sense, cannot and can no longer do everything, decide everything, plan everything, govern everything, finance everything and manage everything on its own and from the centre. Moreover, in a State that intervenes in all areas, society, citizens, communities and the business community are caught up in a morass of regulations, red tape, fees and redistributions. The result is less freedom, initiative, commitment, involvement and entrepreneurship and paves the way for the creation of an environment characterized by a reliance on handouts, immobility, dependency, citizen disengagement and even inertia. The need for decentralization can best be grasped when there is a strong State with a centre that aggregates, consolidates, coordinates, directs, integrates, regulates and supports. However, as the predominant system of public governance, the nation State has actually become increasingly incompatible with contemporary realities, which are characterized by the emergence of multi-stakeholder and multilevel governance.

30. The international community and Member States have decided that local and regional governments must be key actors in the implementation of the above-mentioned agendas, but translating those commitments into reality cannot be done without proper forethought. On the contrary, it is a long-term task. It is therefore urgent to empower, support and equip local and regional governments and communities in order to turn them into reliable partners committed to sustainable development. For that purpose, at least the following reforms will be required.

#### **A gradual turn towards minimal, subsidiary and strategizing States**

31. Establishing institutions that are effective, accountable and open to all means moving more and more towards a “helmsman” State, with a central Government that performs the tasks that only it can perform and that it is best placed to perform. It

---

<sup>6</sup> United Cities and Local Governments.

delegates the other tasks to other stakeholders and intermediaries such as local and regional governments and business and community processes, and intervenes — and only in a secondary capacity — only when an issue cannot be resolved or best resolved by such intermediaries. Comprehensive reorganization of institutions and of the exercise of power and political, economic and administrative authority is therefore required as part of the management of a country's affairs, with the involvement of all actors and stakeholders. Such reorganization, which is based on participatory interaction between the Government and the citizenry, would require a harmonious framework incorporating a number of parameters that benefit a range of actors and governance levels connected by a system of values, roles, responsibilities, rights, duties and interests. Such reorganization would inevitably give rise to both divisions and disputes, in particular when it comes to distinguishing between the national interest and local or regional interests for resource-sharing. Indeed, governance is not simply about government as an institution; it is also about decision-making and all those who are affected by those decisions. The State should therefore change the way it governs by redirecting and refocusing its efforts in the following main directions:

(a) Becoming involved and contributing positively, in the international community, to promoting peace, stability, solidarity and development at the global level;

(b) Establishing and consolidating a stable environment that fosters political, economic and social trust, guarantees macroeconomic stability and enables, promotes and facilitates sustainable development, socialization and empowerment, with a view to gradually preparing other actors to take the helm;

(c) Reviewing the nature of the State, depending on the vision, the current context and the level of development and capacities, choosing a judicious mix of (i) the model of the police State; this model is useful in situations of insecurity, counter-terrorism, conflict or post-conflict and restoration of order and trust; (ii) the model of a State that performs only sovereign functions, as in a federal system; (iii) the model of a welfare State that is still useful in some countries to address human development challenges in order to ensure social cohesion; and (iv) the model of the minimal, strategizing and subsidiary State. The reality of public institutions and the selected model is reflected in particular in the composition of parliaments and governments, the number of ministerial departments, the share of public expenditure in the gross domestic product (GDP) in comparison with spending by private citizens or businesses, the role of the public sector in the machinery of the State and the government payroll as a proportion of GDP. In the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, the minimal State is deprecated and the welfare State is asserting itself once again. Countries that perform best in improving living standards are those that rejected the model of the minimal State from the start. There is therefore a renewed debate with the call to leave no one behind, and States have had to review their welfare policies and institutions to ensure better governance, integration, consistency and convergence of public policies and better targeting of the affected actors, categories and persons;

(d) Undertaking comprehensive and bold reforms and transforming the national and local public sector in a sustainable manner; in other words, making deliberate changes to the structures and processes of public sector organizations

with the objective of getting them to run better, to provide quality services and to be more efficient in terms of cost, targeting, adaptability, accessibility and convenience and, most of all, to achieve results that meet the needs, expectations and priorities of citizens and communities. Structural change may include merging or splitting public sector organizations, or even abolishing them completely, while process change may include redesigning systems, simplifying or abolishing procedures, modernizing human resources management, using contracts to hire employees, setting quality standards, integrating performance indicators, introducing information and communications technologies and promoting electronic administration, training, capacity-building and skills development, operational continuity and capitalization;

(e) Rethinking and transforming leadership in public institutions at all levels as a key factor in setting an example, choosing a way forward, defining needs and priorities, and most of all entrenching a culture of ethical public good governance in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 16;

(f) Promoting ownership of the various sustainable development agendas by various actors and levels of government through the dissemination of information, awareness-raising, dissemination, simplification, adaptation, integration, sharing, communication, participation, dialogue and cooperation, using all available means, including information and communications technologies and social networks;

(g) Acknowledging that local and regional governments have a broad mandate when it comes to the development of the territories they govern and the well-being of citizens and communities, in parallel with the roles and responsibilities entrusted to them by the State. They will thus have the authority, autonomy, legitimacy and means they need to put in place development strategies that dovetail with the Sustainable Development Goals and the needs, vision and national priorities of the State;

(h) Promoting novel national doctrines, policies and strategies to support and assist local and regional governments while giving priority to national stewardship, strategic coordination, facilitation and empowerment. This should go hand-in-hand with efforts to ensure that local and regional governments have the tools they need by providing them with appropriate and adapted services and strengthening the regulatory, integration, standardization, supervision and oversight functions;

(i) Implementing a coherent and integrated national strategy to promote a culture of responsibility, transparency and accountability at all levels and for all actors.

### **Supporting, guiding and promoting the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals**

32. For the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), localizing development should not be seen as “a translation of global policies within local contexts, but rather as a process based on the empowerment of local stakeholders, aimed at making sustainable development more responsive and therefore relevant to local needs, aspirations and lives through sustained exchanges between global, national and local facets. All partners in the effort — governments at all levels, civil society, private sector, development agencies — will need to work closely together

to ensure steady progress on the bold, ambitious and transformative development agenda.”<sup>7</sup> For United Cities and Local Governments, it is vitally important to “[take] into account sub-national contexts, challenges, opportunities and governments at all stages of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, from the setting of goals and targets, to determining the means of implementation and using indicators to monitor progress”,<sup>8</sup> along with experiential learning.

33. Drawing on the outcomes of global discussions on the local implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and as part of its work to support local and regional governments, United Cities and Local Governments is collaborating with UNDP and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) to develop a toolkit for localizing the Sustainable Development Goals. The main tools of the kit are outlined below.

Table 1

*Initializing the Sustainable Development Goals process*

Raising awareness	Diagnostics	Strategies and plans	Monitoring and evaluation
Enabling institutional arrangements for implementation of the Goals			
Multilevel governance	Territorial/multi-stakeholder approach	Accountability	Development cooperation effectiveness
Capacity-strengthening			

34. The work would also entail:

(a) Drafting a comprehensive flow chart of global, national and local or regional agendas, for each Goal and target, showing the roles and responsibilities of each actor involved in the process and the resources available to them;

(b) Having each country identify its priorities in terms of the Goals that must be met and supported;

(c) Taking account of the variety and diversity of country-specific contexts and policies (e.g. development and capacity levels, characteristics of the territorial architecture, status of the decentralization process, performance of local and regional governments, classification of cities, the needs of rural, landlocked or island communities, and the situation of countries in conflict or post-conflict situations or in democratic transition);

<sup>7</sup> UNDP, Integrated Framework to Support Local Governance and Local Development, March 2016. Available from [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Local%20Governance/Integrated\\_Framework\\_LGLD.pdf?download](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Local%20Governance/Integrated_Framework_LGLD.pdf?download).

<sup>8</sup> United Cities and Local Governments, How to Localize Targets and Indicators of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, November 2014. Available from [https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/localization\\_targets\\_indicator\\_web.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/localization_targets_indicator_web.pdf).

(d) Conducting an in-depth analysis of the division and transfer of powers and responsibilities both horizontally, between sectoral authorities, and vertically. This must be based on clear and relevant principles and mechanisms with which to identify the actor(s) and the level(s) of power, authority, governance and responsibility that can ensure accountable, effective, efficient, rational, timely, compliant, transparent and results-based implementation of the Goals. The frameworks and modalities for collaboration, partnership and cooperation, including with respect to shared responsibilities and resource allocation, should also be determined;

(e) Dividing the various global agendas into national systems or agendas that incorporate enabling policy frameworks at all levels, integrated strategic plans and effective means of implementation. These systems and agendas must also include the encouragement of international cooperation and partnerships, the sharing of best practices and the allocation of the necessary resources to address critical concerns. It is also important to create, promote and enhance open, user-friendly and participatory data platforms for the transfer and sharing of knowledge and to ensure efficiency and transparency through e-governance and approaches assisted by information and communications technologies. In all this, there must be flexibility in the design of plans, policies and programmes aimed at responding to national, central, local and regional needs, using diverse approaches to local governance and development.

### **Sufficient access to resources, financing and investment for local and regional governments**

35. The State and central administrations are usually the highest consumers of resources, financing and investment. Yet the powers of this level of government are meant to be clearly defined and limited to sovereign duties and to stewardship, standardization, integration, regulation and oversight at the national level. The success of local and regional governments in this regard is contingent on:

(a) State intervention in the form of public funding, which is vital for maintaining peace, law and order and stability, and provision of basic infrastructure, services and equipment to ensure adequate development and accessibility throughout the country. This is particularly applicable to developing, emerging, vulnerable and landlocked countries, and countries in conflict or post-conflict situations or in democratic transition;

(b) A more equitable and transparent distribution of resources and investments between the State and local and regional governments, and between urban and rural areas, together with a transfer of powers and responsibilities;

(c) The promotion of an enabling environment for local and regional governments through effective and efficient financial decentralization, improvement or improvement of local and regional finances, and a gradual shift towards locally sourced capital that would empower local actors, with fewer transfers from the State. In this regard, United Cities and Local Governments recommends that local resources should be equivalent to 20 per cent of national resources by the end of this decade. This could be achieved by establishing an overarching body for monitoring

local finances that would be responsible for evaluation, follow-up and assistance in the area of fiscal reform, and the provision of transparent financial databases with a view to promoting accountability and improving the relationship of trust with investors;

(d) Better access to funding and new funding mechanisms, including through sustainable partnerships for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as well as better targeting of official development assistance<sup>9</sup> and good governance of development cooperation;

(e) The promotion and effective implementation of responsibility, transparency and accountability in local finance, fiscal and property matters.

### **Structuring, strengthening and equipping local and regional governments**

36. In implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16, and given its centrality in the 2030 Agenda as a whole, States' efforts to build effective, accountable and transparent institutions should not be restricted to the central government; local and regional institutions and urban centres must also play their part. For example, structuring, equipping, updating and computerizing civil registry services would greatly enhance the implementation of the Goals, in particular as regards the registration of births and deaths, mapping of school zones and health facilities and statistics. Adopting a code of ethics on local governance and subsequently disseminating it and raising awareness of its contents, promoting the right to access information locally, and protecting fundamental freedoms would all have the same effect.

37. It is necessary to act now to upgrade, professionalize, motivate, train and build the capacity of human resources at the local level. In order to address current challenges and implement the 2030 Agenda, particularly in developing, emerging and vulnerable countries and countries that are in crisis, local and regional governments and cities must be leading the effort. However, most of the time, local and regional leaders emphasize the need to improve their financial resource capacity but rarely mention the critical issue of their human resources. Human resources are one of the most crucial prerequisites for the success of the decentralization and local governance process, and for the position of local and regional governments as key actors in these agendas. There is therefore an urgent need to address the issue of human resources and their positioning, expertise, skills and professionalization.

38. At this level, human resources encounter a multitude of challenges that have rarely been the subject of research, analysis, evaluation or enduring reforms. In fact, in most local public sector reforms human resources issues are marginalized. According to *United Cities and Local Governments — Africa*, African local

---

<sup>9</sup> See the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and the sub-national financing mechanisms outlined therein; and *United Cities and Local Governments*, Position paper on aid effectiveness and local government, 2009, available from [http://effectivecooperation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Local-governments-and-aid-effectiveness\\_en\\_uclg\\_position\\_paper\\_final.pdf](http://effectivecooperation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Local-governments-and-aid-effectiveness_en_uclg_position_paper_final.pdf).

authorities must consider the complexity and intertwined nature of the challenges that they currently face, and take steps to:

(a) Initiate a permanent, continuous and sustainable process of awareness-raising, training and professional capacity-building for local elected officials and local and regional government staff, considering them an investment to be included in these entities' investment budgets and factored into their long-term planning rather than treated as an annual operating expense, as often happens;

(b) Adopt a long-term outlook and vision in this area, as part of an approach founded on the ongoing consolidation of achievements;

(c) Ensure that the long-term outlook does not obscure the need to act urgently, and the concomitant need for a strategic approach that combines an emergency response with the roll-out of training and capacity-building measures that can provide an enduring solution to the challenge of human resource development at the local level;

(d) Take into account the worrying change in the status of public sector jobs, which are heavily devalued and no longer the first career choice for young people entering the labour market, particularly at the local level. It is essential to create a more incentivizing and attractive framework, without sacrificing the requirement of ethical conduct in the public sector;

(e) Develop holistic, integrated and coherent medium- and long-term national strategies for training, capacity-building and skills development for the benefit of local elected officials and territorial civil servants that take into account issues of diversity, gender, disability and illiteracy, while guaranteeing the means and funding needed for their implementation, monitoring, evaluation and impact measurement;

(f) Accord greater attention to the establishment of a communities of practice and expertise through peer learning, study trips, exchanges of best practices and professional networking;

(g) View all training and capacity-building as part of a process of lifelong experiential learning, to ensure continuous, flexible professional development that is capable of driving change;

(h) Identify appropriate areas for awareness-raising, training and capacity-building related to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals for different actors and levels of government;<sup>10</sup>

(i) Develop a revitalized educational system based on teacher training, learning packages, toolkits, case studies, role-playing games and good practices, online learning platforms, tutoring, mentoring and sponsorship, while taking cultural diversity into account;

(j) Disseminating, particularly at the local and regional government level, the standards of excellence for the training of public administration officials

---

<sup>10</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Sharing responsibilities and resources among levels of government: localizing the Sustainable Development Goals", p. 24.



developed in 2008 by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration;

(k) Adopt, ratify and implement agendas, charters and codes of ethics, and promote the values of good governance. Examples in Africa include Agenda 2063 of the African Union: The Africa we want, the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development of June 2014 and the African Charter on Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration of January 2011.

### **Integration, harmonization, coordination and coherence of initiatives in support of local implementation of sustainable development agendas**

39. A salient factor that impeded the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals was the chaotic proliferation — especially in developing countries and in African countries — of initiatives to support Member States, local and regional governments and civil society. These initiatives were taken by multilateral institutions, regional multilateral institutions, national funding agencies, private foundations and national, regional and international associations of local and regional governments, with no strategic vision or emphasis on knowledge-sharing, and throughout, national governments sat back and allowed events to run their course.

40. Effective, efficient and sustainable implementation of the 2030 Agenda, particularly in a time of crises and scarce resources, requires a radical transformation of the processes through which support and assistance are provided to local and regional governments, and also requires national governments to take matters back in hand.

41. The UNDP initiative in partnership with the United Nations Volunteers and the United Nations Capital Development Fund stands out among the initiatives undertaken in 2016 and deserves special attention: it should be disseminated and taken up by all actors and at all levels of government. It is the integrated framework for supporting local governance and local development at the country programme level, with a view to improving the quality of life of local people and building resilient relations State-society relations, based on the inputs and outputs listed in the table below:

Table 2

<i>Six key inputs from the local governance system</i>	<i>Six main outputs of a successful integrated approach</i>
The facilitation of democratic accountability	Local and regional associations empowered with meaningful autonomy and embedded in effective accountability networks
Strengthening rule of law and security	Equitable and effective delivery of goods and services

<i>Six key inputs from the local governance system</i>	<i>Six main outputs of a successful integrated approach</i>
The development of necessary administrative capacity for development management and service delivery	Inclusive decision-making processes involving women and men
The facilitation of necessary fiscal empowerment and resources	A secure environment where the rule of law prevails
The availability of spatial information	The sustainable use and management of natural resources
The crucial acceleration of social capital formation	Increased economic opportunities (and jobs) for women and men

42. The implementation of this process requires multidimensional capacities, including the capacity for steering a national visioning process, the capacity for sector development planning, the capacity for steering the subnational development planning process, the capacity to engage in territorial partnerships and exchanges, the capacity for fostering social cohesion and managing heterogeneous societies, knowledge management and advocacy, and providing capacity support under UNDP programming context.<sup>11</sup>

43. Given the above, it is necessary to carry out a preliminary survey of all the similar initiatives developed to date, to ensure their harmonization, coherence and integration, and to put an end to “reinventing the wheel” to reduce costs and, most importantly, to make them accessible to local and regional governments and their national associations and networks, with due consideration for their diversity.

44. In conclusion, every country requires a strong State. Its two fundamental pillars must be the rule of law and democracy; it must be accountable, competent, transparent, capable of regulating and resilient, in order to build a nation characterized by stability and solidarity. The State must, on the one hand, gradually seek to establish a democracy that fosters the widest possible participation in the management of public affairs of local significance, and, on the other, guarantee the administrative effectiveness and efficiency that should characterize any public service, whether national or local, without losing sight of the fact that successful decentralization is dependent on a strong State.

45. In addition to institutional and process reforms, decentralization and local governance are more works in progress than completed agendas. They are genuinely open-ended projects requiring continuous action, building, adjustment, regulation, adjudication, correction and capitalization. In this connection, time is of the essence. Any efforts to that end must include both swift, focused, efficient, effective and practical action capable of attracting the support of an increasingly demanding population whose expectations will only become higher, and steady, long-term

<sup>11</sup> UNDP, “Integrated Framework to Support Local Governance and Local Development”, pp. 17-21.

---

action that will ensure the durability of the reforms necessary for the achievement of sustainable development in its three dimensions by 2030.

46. To reconcile these two approaches, we believe some fundamental recommendations must be followed:

(a) Prepare and consolidate a favourable, enabling and facilitating environment for decentralization in support of local governance and sustainable development in its three dimensions;

(b) Ensure coherence between global agendas, national strategies and priorities, and local and regional strategies and priorities;

(c) Identify roles and responsibilities and allocate the necessary resources to each actor and level of government;

(d) Strengthen, support and consolidate local and regional governments and their associations and networks, to make them strong, dynamic actors with autonomy, responsibility, skills, powers and resources;

(e) Strengthen local and regional administrations and invest in their human capital;

(f) Invest in electronic governance as a means of establishing transparent institutions and improving the quality of services;

(g) Retain decentralization, local governance and local public administration as priority areas on the international agenda over the next few years.