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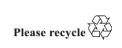Item 5 (c) of the provisional agenda*
High-level segment: annual ministerial review

Statement submitted by United Cities and Local Governments, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

If the post-2015 process is by essence intergovernmental, under the leadership of United Nations, it should be, as raised in the outcome document of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, an open, transparent and inclusive process. Furthermore, local governments support the United Nations task team in its call for a global and more holistic approach towards defining the new framework, based on the principles and values adopted in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

The agenda should be universally ambitious, addressing both developed and developing countries, establish concrete end goals and targets while keeping in mind that one size does not fit all and the need for flexibility for each country, and should be people-centred.

Great successes have been encountered in the implementation of some of the Millennium Development Goals in many countries but national averages, which may show improvements at the country level, often hide severe subnational disparities. Territorial inequalities should be addressed by the future agenda.

The goals and targets of the future development agenda should provide some guidelines on how and who should act. This suggests the need for a shift in focus from lists of goals and targets of what must be done, to how key goals and targets would be achieved and who has to act and be supported.

Key principles for reshaping the global partnership for development and strengthened accountability mechanisms are as follows:

• Success in the post-2015 process success can only be guaranteed if we develop a sense of ownership and accountability at all levels, international, national and subnational

• The agenda should be based on the needs of the people and communities at the local level

• The agenda should further promote a high degree of policy coherence at the global, national but also subnational levels and define shared responsibilities

An urbanized world

Sustainable urbanization is increasingly recognized as a crucial issue and platform for change in the coming years owing to rapid urbanization, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

The Rio Declaration adopted in June 2012 has highlighted the importance of urban issues. On that occasion, the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, highlighted the strategic role played by cities, declaring that the road to global sustainability ran through the world's cities and towns and that the building of more sustainable cities and regions would lead us to a more sustainable world.

Indeed, cities represent both the greatest challenge and the greatest hope for a sustainable future. Urban areas are now, more than ever, recognized as central to economic growth and development. Cities are major places of consumption and production, innovation and exchange. However, they are also the locus for many development challenges. United Nations projections suggest that almost all of the

growth in the world's population in the period 2010-2030 will be in the urban areas of present-day low- and middle-income countries, with particularly rapid urbanization expected in Africa and in Asia. The infrastructure to provide food, basic services and employment for all of the 1.4 billion new urban dwellers still does not exist. Moreover, unsustainable patterns of consumption and production and dependency on fossil fuels in existing human settlements continue to prevail. Furthermore, urban population growth will be accompanied by an expansion of the built-up area of cities over neighbouring areas, much of which will take place in low-elevation coastal and other risky zones adjacent to biodiversity hotspots and prone to cyclones, floods and sea-level rise.

Sustainable development goals and post-2015 development agenda

At the present, critical stage of the negotiations, the local and regional authorities strongly encourage Member States and the global development community to build on the lessons and achievements of the Millennium Development Goals, capitalize on the megatrend of urbanization in order to halt growing inequality and long-standing poverty through intervention at the city-region scale and acknowledge the urban challenge and support the territorial approach and the cohesion needed to ensure that all citizens have access to the basic services that lay the ground for prosperous livelihoods and societies by adopting a stand-alone goal on sustainable urbanization in the post-2015 development agenda.

Stand-alone goal on sustainable urbanization

The urbanization trend will affect many of the sustainable development policies to be adopted within the framework of the sustainable development agenda. Therefore, all goals should have an urban focus.

Beyond the transversality of the urban approach, many Member States, major groups, civil society organizations and local and subnational governments and their associations consider that a stand-alone goal on sustainable urbanization is required in order:

- To provide holistic, integrated, territorial-based, inclusive, visionary and transformative solutions to address and meet the complex social, economic, environmental, cultural and institutional challenges of the urban world of the twenty-first century

- To seize the opportunities that local and subnational governments offer as actors and governmental stakeholders in development and in urban areas as agents of national economic growth and as the locus of technological, social and governance innovation

- To foster the multilevel and multi-stakeholder collaboration necessary for concomitantly managing and planning urban areas, urban-rural continuums, surrounding areas, communities and ecosystems

Indeed, the sustainable urbanization agenda cannot be developed without taking into account the territory in which global urbanization will have impacts: it must overcome the dichotomy of rural versus urban, and ensure cohesion among territories within the important metropolization processes that are taking place.

The adoption of such a goal will further demonstrate the integrating and interconnecting role played by cities and regions, their importance in global resource footprints, and their key contributions towards achieving long-term sustainability for all by translating broad global goals into concrete, real world implementation efforts.

Moreover, a goal on sustainable urbanization will send a strong political signal and provide a solid policy framework that will enable and empower action by all levels of government. The elaboration of sustainable urbanization requires collaboration among the various levels of governance in the territories, particularly at the local and subnational levels. It needs also to be based on a close link with civil society actors, namely, private sector and civil society organizations, with specific attention to initiatives led by youth and women's organizations.

Beyond urbanization: role of local governments in the sustainable development agenda

In the outcome document of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Member States acknowledged efforts and progress made at the local and subnational levels, and recognized the important role that such authorities and communities could play in implementing sustainable development.

To ensure that local governments have the full capacity to engage in the achievement of the future development agenda, consideration should be given to the issues presented below.

Multilevel governance

Governance should be recognized as a transversal theme of all Millennium Development Goal and sustainable development goal frameworks.

The imperative of greater decentralization to local governments must be recognized. The basic guiding principle of subsidiarity must be promoted as a vehicle to strengthen democracy and service provision, and an enabling environment should be ensured to enable local authorities to take on their responsibilities, that is, adequate institutional frameworks, reinforced management capacities and, above all, subnational resources.

The entrenchment of local democracy should be seen as a vector or lever of change for sustainable development and stronger governance. Important progress has been made with regard to local democracy but considerable efforts are needed to strengthen effective, transparent and accountable local institutions. Subnational authorities can only take on their responsibilities and be held accountable by their constituents if the distribution of resources and responsibilities among the different levels of government is clearly defined and well balanced. Developing solid intergovernmental relations and appropriate governance represents a daunting challenge that should be reflected in adequate expenditure at the local level.

Women's participation in political life

The promotion of women's participation in local decision-making processes must play a pivotal role in the global development strategy over the next 10 years.

The equal representation of women and men in elected posts at all levels of government is a priority objective owing to the impact that it has on other spheres of activity. Increased participation of women in political life contributes to women friendly services, greater employment of women, and policy development based on the specific needs of women and girls.

Particular attention should be devoted to the participation of women and other vulnerable groups in local institutions, both through traditional forms of public consultation and innovative forms of participation (i.e., participatory budgeting and planning).

Urban planning and territorial cohesion

Local governments are key players in ensuring urban governance and well-functioning interaction between urban centres and the surrounding rural areas. As the economic and social linkages between rural and urban areas increase, their relationship contributes to regional integration. National urban policies should contribute to and facilitate local urban policies, promoting an enabling environment to local planning and supporting local self-governance.

Urban planning should:

• Respond to changing local contexts in order to promote more compact, mixed and inclusive cities, reducing urban sprawl and promoting public space as a place for social interaction, under the premise of sustainability and poverty reduction

• Strengthen the environmental dimension and the sustainability and resilience of cities by enabling the assessment of risk, the reduction of vulnerability to disasters, and the reduction of the energy consumption and footprint of cities

• Build on the links between economic and spatial planning to attract and promote economic development which creates jobs and wealth

Inclusive cities and territories

Urbanization is a contradictory process: although cities constitute the space to which people come with the expectation of finding more opportunities, they also generate serious problems of social exclusion, inter alia, job insecurity, pollution, spatial segregation and precarious housing. Poverty is becoming more and more urbanized, particularly in middle-income countries.

Local governments, as both the providers or managers of a range of basic services (e.g. water, sanitation, basic education, health, environmental protection, culture, urban and territorial planning etc.) and the implementers of many responsibilities linked to health, education, economic opportunity and risk reduction, targeting the most vulnerable social sectors and minorities, are key to ensuring efficient policies for poverty reduction and equality in urban areas and thereby reducing inequalities.

One member in seven of the world's population lives in urban slums or informal settlements that have inadequate or no provision for infrastructure and services. In low- and middle-income nations, these settlements often house one third to one half of the city's population (and usually a higher proportion of its workforce). It is within these settlements that many aspects of inequality become

most evident: in the provision of basic services and infrastructure, in housing quality and in access to health and education.

Many local governments have greatly reduced inequalities by upgrading programmes in informal settlements, including expanding water, sewerage and drainage networks, expanding or improving provision for solid-waste collection, and influencing the prices and availability of housing through the provision of land. Many city governments now work with the organizations and federations of slum and shack dwellers to address directly a range of inequalities that include housing tenure, infrastructure, services, rule of law and participation.

The management of migration is becoming a challenge in many contexts, not only for national governments but local governments which are increasingly involved in its management.

There are many examples of cities having developed innovative policies to combat segregation through urban rehabilitation of neighbourhoods, fostering multiculturalism to promote inclusion and combat discrimination or promoting prevention of risk in vulnerable communities, in partnership with civil society organizations.

Also at the core of sustainable urban development and inclusive cities is the explicit consideration of cultural issues as a necessary condition. Culture is both a driver of development (through a solid cultural policy, with museums, festivals and cultural centres) and an enabler of development (because culture generates wealth, creates social inclusion and regenerates the territory).

We must build cities that maintain their heritage, with the active involvement of the cultural expressions of the inhabitants and from perspectives based on creativity and innovation.

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