

#Listen2Cities  
#HLPF2023



# JOINT STATEMENT TO THE 2023 HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

of the organized constituency of local  
and regional governments



## I. Preamble

- 1) We, the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF), gathering over 35 global city and regional networks worldwide, adopt the present political declaration, which captures our perspectives, insights and experiences as key elements for accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels. This declaration will feed into the 2023 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, which will focus on the mid-term review of the 2030 Agenda, and also feed into the second SDG Summit, to be convened under the auspices of the General Assembly on 18–19 September 2023.
- 2) We represent the diversity of united voices gathered within the self-organized constituency of local and regional governments from across the globe, representing the populations of metropolises, peripheral cities, intermediary cities, regions, rural areas and small municipalities, gathered as an organized constituency convened by the Global Taskforce's member local and regional governments and facilitated by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). We come as members of coalitions and platforms, regional networks, national consortiums and local, regional and international associations.
- 3) In this year of mid-term review of the SDGs, we renew our resolve to fulfil the targets, actions and commitment of the 2030 Agenda and the principles enshrined in it, including to leave no one behind. We welcome, in this sense, this HLPF as a milestone in the preparation for the SDG Summit and the theme of its general debate "Building momentum towards the 2023 SDG Summit: Transformation for accelerating implementation of the SDGs." We recognize the positive role of the HLPF as a central platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and a space with an unparalleled potential to become a worldwide reporting platform for all the actors working towards implementation, including local and regional governments.
- 4) We recognize the substantive role of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in the preparations for the thematic reviews of the 2023 HLPF, and in ensuring and coordinating the input of Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) to the HLPF and other intergovernmental processes on sustainable development as underlined by the 2030 Agenda.
- 5) We appreciate the holding of the Local and Regional Governments Forum (LRGF), facilitated by UCLG on behalf of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments in collaboration with UN DESA, UN-Habitat, UNDP and Local2030, as part of the official programme of the HLPF.
- 6) We stress the importance of the LRGF since 2018 as a collective political forum to accelerate the SDGs and pledge to continue working with the organizing partners to further consolidate it as a space that embodies and strengthens the engagement of the constituency with the HLPF and the 2030 Agenda, and commit to ensure it is multistakeholder and multilevel.
- 7) We acknowledge the continued process of in-depth review of the SDGs, with this year's review of SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation; SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy;

SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure; SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities; and SDG 17 on partnerships for the Goals. We understand these goals as articulators of the 2030 Agenda as a whole, building on the principle of interconnectedness between all the SDGs that provides a blueprint for a global partnership for the goals, overcoming silos in their implementation.

- 8) We reclaim SDG 11 as an indispensable accelerator of the 2030 Agenda as it represents the opportunity to place urban and territorial equality at the heart of all actions to achieve the SDGs from a human rights perspective. This is fundamental for ensuring that the trade-offs between the different SDGs are navigated and enables the urban dimension of the 2030 Agenda.
- 9) We call on the HLPF to reflect the bold recommendations of the UN Secretary General's report, *Our Common Agenda*, to create a stronger, more networked and inclusive multilateral system within the United Nations, with the role of cities and other subnational authorities, in particular, being recognized.
- 10) We welcome the final report of the UN High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, *A Breakthrough for People and Planet*. It dedicates a full section to cities and regions, recommends a special status for them in the renewed multilateral system, and proposes that the Summit of the Future serves to identify relevant institutions and processes in which local and regional governments are offered a formal and permanent status, including in the area of sustainable development. We further welcome the recommendation contained in the report that localization should be an explicit part of national commitments on the 2030 Agenda.
- 11) As we reaffirm our commitment to actively contribute to the acceleration of the 2030 Agenda, we underline the central role for local and regional governments in advancing sustainable development, working in synergistic relationships across the rural-urban continuum. We note that an estimated 65% of SDG targets must be implemented in urban areas with engagement of local and regional governments.
- 12) As the SDGs are based on "reducing inequality within and among countries" and "achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls," women's rights, gender equality and women's empowerment must be strategically at the centre of efforts for the implementation of all UN development frameworks.
- 13) We recall the Political Declaration of the 2019 SDG Summit, which calls for bolstering local action to accelerate implementation and empower and support local and regional governments and communities in pursuing the 2030 Agenda while recognizing their critical role in implementing and realizing the SDGs. We further appreciate the draft political declaration of the 2023 SDG Summit, which recognizes the important contribution of local and regional governments, among other constituencies of the UN, to the 2030 Agenda and to enhancing global, regional, national and local partnerships for sustainable development.
- 14) We further appreciate the 2019 *Global Sustainable Development Report* (GSDR) with its call for national governments to adapt "knowledge and technologies to specific local

and regional contexts to maximize synergies between the Goals and pre-emptively accommodate emerging challenges beyond the 2030 horizon.” We welcome the efforts by the independent group of scientists in charge of the 2023 GSDR to extend consultations with the organized constituency of local and regional governments as part of the report drafting process.

- 15) Reaffirming our commitment to achieving the universal development agendas, understanding that they need to be realized in unison through enhanced cooperation on critical challenges and gaps in global governance, we look forward to the SDG Summit, the Summit of the Future and the World Social Summit as part of a same process towards a reinvigorated multilateral system in which all the global development agendas are acknowledged and implemented as one.

## **II. Voluntary Local Reviews and Voluntary Subnational Reviews as policy tools for localizing transformation**

- 16) In recalling the Political Declaration of the 2019 SDG Summit, we reiterate that local and regional governments and their networks have been at the forefront of transformative action to localize the universal development agendas. In recent years, monitoring and reporting processes related to this action have evolved, becoming tools for policy development and co-creation.
- 17) The total number of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) available worldwide has been growing exponentially, with over 240 reports representing a total of 579 million inhabitants. Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) have also been experiencing a rapid increase with 37 reports produced since 2020, representing 170,000 local governments and 1.4 billion inhabitants. In turn, Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) progressively mention these subnational reporting efforts, and some countries include local government associations in the drafting of the reports – although recognition is still not systematic enough. Overall, there has been a slight increase in local and regional governments’ participation in Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes since the first VNRs were published in 2016: LRG involvement was medium to high in 32% of countries that produced one in 2016, compared to 39% in 2023. However, progress is not steady and marked by important regional disparities.
- 18) With VLRs and VSRs proving to have positive impacts on local governance – by increasing transparency, accountability and ownership of the SDGs – and on influencing national dialogues and mechanisms for SDG implementation and VNRs, we reiterate our commitment to fostering the development of VLRs and VSRs and the strengthening of national coordination mechanisms, with a focus on raising awareness on the importance of localizing the SDGs.
- 19) We pledge to support the work of the Local2030 Coalition; the preparation of VLRs and VSRs; and the mobilization of local and regional governments, their associations and other local stakeholders for the integration of plans, policies and programmes at the local and subnational scales.

- 20) We call for the acknowledgement of VLR and VSR processes as policy tools integral to fostering achievement of the universal development agendas and creating more traction for the Goals. We further call for enhanced involvement of local and regional governments and their associations in national reporting processes, in particular through VNRs, the promotion of the development of VLRs and VSRs and the full recognition of local and subnational monitoring and reporting processes in official HLPF deliberations.

### **III. A next generation of local public service provision for SDG localization**

- 21) Within the context of the in-depth SDG 11 review, we stress the direct interconnection between this goal's localization and quality and equitable local public service provision as well as the 2030 Agenda as a whole. Local public service provision is a precondition for the achievement of the SDGs and the backbone of our cities, towns and territories, ensuring that all communities, regardless of administrative status or any other condition, can live healthy, fulfilling and sustainable lives, through the provision of water and sanitation, housing, food security, education and health care, among other services.
- 22) In line with the theme of this HLPF on "Accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels," the dramatic social effects of the pandemic catalyzed the need for the next generation of public service provision, one that puts care for our communities and the planet at the centre.
- 23) Ahead of the SDG Summit, and the 2023 High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage, we call to include local and regional governments in the decisions around healthcare at all levels. Health-related governance needs to be a catalyst to the rest of the goals, with local provision of health as the cornerstone of local public service delivery.
- 24) This next generation of public service provision is based on reinforced social protection systems, where care services no longer fall on women, racialized persons and/or migrant persons. Where accessibility is at the heart of rights-based policy-making and planning. Where access to the internet and technology for all is considered a baseline. Where mental health care and social counselling for people of all ages is available, and where the upskilling of people is prioritized to empower communities and foster human creativity.
- 25) We stress the need for this next generation of public service provision to be recognized, fostered, supported and mainstreamed at all levels, including by renewing the understanding of the commons as both resources and social practices that interconnect the local, national, regional and global spheres of action. We further stress the need to acknowledge the key role that local and regional public service provision plays in caring for people and the planet and protecting the commons, as well as its direct link to the implementation of SDG 11, the 2030 Agenda as a whole and all the other development agendas. We further stress the need for this next generation of public service provision to be strengthened through a new way of financing development.

- 26) We call for including local and regional governments that have demonstrated the power of solidarity-based policy in decision-making at all levels and in the management of complex emergencies, where local and regional governments have proven to be at the forefront of guaranteeing rights and equitable access to local public service provision.

#### **IV. A new social contract for equality and democracy**

- 27) Acknowledging the first of the 12 key proposals contained in *Our Common Agenda*, “leave no one behind,” we are committed to put at the centre of public action at all levels the urgent need to repair the impact of the pandemic among those who already had less opportunities. Workers and persons living in informality, mostly migrant and displaced communities, together with women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons and other structurally marginalized groups, have been among the hardest hit.
- 28) In order to address inequalities and their multidimensional roots, we commit to place at the core of our efforts the development of a rights-centred, values-driven new social contract based on justice and local democracy, which recognizes the needs and aspirations of the historically marginalized and fosters gender equality and the participation of local feminist leaders in decision-making as core to democracy. We further commit to work towards ensuring that all people live healthy and fulfilling lives as the key to developing demographic resilience and facing the overlapping crises.
- 29) We pledge to work in partnership with national governments and other stakeholders to retool the current system to mainstream a right-based approach to safe and affordable housing for all people, everywhere, acknowledging the value of common goods such as water, healthcare and sanitation, and placing care for our populations at the centre, reducing gaps in income and service access while enhancing the political participation of all.
- 30) For this new social contract to effectively address current inequalities to leave no one behind, we call for building on the voices and experiences of local communities and enhancing the participation and representation of women and girls and any other disadvantaged group, addressing accessibility barriers and the discrimination facing structurally marginalized groups to ensure all voices are at the decision-making table and to rebuild trust.
- 31) We further call for recognizing the right to water and sanitation as a global common good to be collectively protected through local to global actions; promoting adequate housing and equitable access to all common goods as a human right, including accelerating the upgrading of informal settlements; and paying closer attention to the needs and aspirations of communities regardless of administrative status.
- 32) We recognize that culture (intercultural dialogue, heritage in all forms, cultural diversity, creativity, transmission of knowledge) remains undervalued and underutilized in the push for SDG progress. We will act to analyze the role of culture as a global public good, including greater consideration of culture’s role in supporting SDG achievement now, and analyze a potential stand-alone Culture Goal post-2030.

**V. A regenerated relationship with nature**

- 33) Echoing the theme of this HLPF of driving transformation for accelerated implementation of the SDGs, we recall the pressing need to acknowledge that effective change at scale will only be possible by rethinking our relationship with nature and our ecosystems, adopting a rights-based approach through a re-naturing lens to put care for our planet and social justice at the core of our joint action.
- 34) We commit to contribute to this transformation through localization processes that are nature-positive, bringing to consideration big and intermediary cities, small towns, regions, territories and rural areas and reinforcing urban-rural linkages and integrating proximity, biodiversity preservation and resilience approaches in policy-making and planning. This approach will, in turn, promote meaningful change in our patterns of transport, work, habitat, culture, health, higher education and consumption that are central to preserving our planet, developing urban and territorial quality of life and harnessing inclusive innovation and value creation while addressing climate change adaptation.
- 35) We further pledge, as the closest level of government to communities and as the protectors of territories' biodiversity, to embody a vision for a better relationship with nature. We call for concrete articulations with the official Member-States deliberations on loss and damages, taking place at COP28 this year, where we have put climate justice between the Global North and South at the core.
- 36) We call for the recognition of the key role of local and regional governments, cities and territories in the protection and promotion of local and global commons that contribute to regenerating livelihoods and protecting our planet and ecosystems, and their direct link to the achievement of SDG 11, all SDGs and other international development agendas, such as the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
- 37) We further call for supporting and fostering the transformation of our consumption and production patterns towards models grounded in proximity and circularity that are sustainable, accessible, inclusive and environmentally sound and that create ecological, cultural, economic and social value for communities. We also call for including local and regional governments in global discussions as they have consistently shown their innovative action in addressing biodiversity loss, building resilience and granting access to water and sanitation and to affordable and clean energy, including through local public service provision.

**VI. A revitalized multilateral system, high-impact partnerships and a new financial system**

- 38) As we welcome the final report of the UN High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, *A Breakthrough for People and Planet*, whose six transformative shifts

stress the importance of rebuilding trust in multilateralism and of broad representation of all spheres of government, we reaffirm our commitment to a revitalized multilateral system that is inclusive, networked and anchored in human rights for all. Such a renewed multilateral system must build on localization, local democracy and strengthened local self-government as a means to ensure peace, unity and trust in our institutions and to build a new social contract, with co-responsibility and active participation of all citizens at the centre of global governance.

- 39) We commit to partnering in the building of a multilateral system characterized by multistakeholder engagement, multilevel governance and decentralized sharing of power and responsibilities, in which all actors are invited to the decision-making table, including through a stronger, more inclusive HLPF that institutionalizes dialogue with local and regional governments, and by renewing the notion of partnerships based on intergovernmental coordination as well as cooperation among key actors and sectors to foster innovation and achieve the impact needed to close the gap in SDG implementation.
- 40) We commit to work hand in hand with Member States and other stakeholders to identify and address the principal challenges local and regional governments face in working to achieve the SDGs and other global agendas, including weak capacities, limited support and financial transfers from national governments, limited local interest and/or awareness and limited coordination with other levels of government.
- 41) We urge the HLPF and the ECOSOC Presidency to take note of the growing consensus calling for greater presence of local and regional governments in multilateral governance processes for the achievement of the SDGs and the global development agendas, and to continue supporting the engagement of local and regional governments in light of the SDG Summit, the Summit of the Future and the World Social Summit.

## **VII. A new economic and financial system to rethink development**

- 42) We call for a profound change in the values that underpin development; we need to rethink it through the lenses of redistribution, decentralization, reappropriation of the commons and redefinition of care. There is an urgent need to transform our current economic and financial systems to achieve just, inclusive and sustainable societies. Furthermore, the current economic interdependence weakens subsistence economies by threatening food sovereignty, among others, but also impedes local resilience during crises and therefore calls for a re-territorialisation of our economies and a more resilient and sustainable production to fulfil everyone's basic needs.
- 43) Building on the call from *Our Common Agenda*, which highlights how a true global economy needs adequately resourced public sectors for the delivery of global public goods, we recall the critical importance of promoting a more distributive economic system as well as fairer financial and commercial practices to protect and improve local service provision, address inequalities and develop green and social infrastructure throughout territories.



- 44) We further call for rethinking financing and revenue streams to achieve the global agendas through a renewed fiscal architecture by directly targeting financing mechanisms empowering local and regional governments to strengthen their own resources and to localize and accelerate the SDGs.

**VIII. Our expectations**

- 45) We request Member States to acknowledge the commitment and pledges of the constituency of local and regional governments through this declaration and to support the processes mentioned in the above sections.
- 46) We request Member States to strengthen dialogue with and involvement of local and regional governments in the preparation of HLPFs.
- 47) Fundamental, transformative and urgent change at all levels and by all stakeholders is needed to overcome the crises and obstacles facing our world. Only by fostering co-creation and working together can we achieve the 2030 Agenda and build a more just, peaceful and sustainable world for all.

