



## A SEAT AT THE GLOBAL TABLE: LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AS DECISION-MAKERS IN WORLD AFFAIRS

*In an increasingly globalized and urban world, cities face great challenges and opportunities. These need to be addressed through a new global governance model concerning all issues related to sustainable development. This document proposes a series of measures to improve this global urban governance, which leads to the internationalization of cities and where the “voice” of local authorities is taken into account at decision-making spaces at the international and global levels.*

*These proposals are the result of a rich and substantial debate between local and regional governments and international networks in Latin America, North America, Europe, Asia and Africa. The debate was organized around three main topics: 1) What added value do local governments provide to the New Urban Agenda? 2) Why is a change in the global governance system needed? and 3) Which would be the best approach to achieve that local governments take their due place in the decision-making global table?, and using an innovative methodology based on dialogue and the exchange of knowledge among the different urban stakeholders.*

*These discussions were developed through a series of workshops in 2016: in Paris on July 5, Barcelona on July 7, and Bogotá on October 12. Moreover, the opinions and comments of many people, gathered in interviews and through urban networks and specialized websites, were also taken into account.*

*This document has been coordinated by the Metropolitan District of Quito and the Government of Mexico City through the European-Latin American Cooperation Alliance among Cities (AL-LAs), the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments for Habitat III (GTF) and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), with the financial support of the European Union.*

### Our added value: our contribution to the global table



#### 01 A profound urban and territorial knowledge

Cities have a great territorial and urban knowledge due to their access to relevant information on basic services, housing, infrastructures and all other indicators of urban life. Local authorities are uniquely placed to provide the necessary technical knowledge in the face of the challenges and priorities of an increasingly globalized and urban world. We, therefore, call for:

- Strengthening the role of local governments in the implementation, evaluation and impact assessment of the New Urban Agenda at the territorial level.
- Taking into account the capacities of local authorities and the needs of cities and citizens for the design and definition of comprehensive strategies and approaches for the sustainable urban development.



#### 02 Closest to the citizens

The democratic legitimacy of local governments is based on their direct relationship with the citizens. Local governments are the first to respond effectively to the challenges posed by an increasingly diverse and multicultural society that calls for more participatory and interactive processes, where women are empowered in their right to participate effectively with equal opportunities, in order to improve the habitability, the equity and the urban harmony and social co-existence, which are the main challenges of the New Urban Agenda. We require:

- Empowering citizens and urban stakeholders through local governments, since these are who bring their demands, needs and needs to the national authorities and the international community, fostering a proactive citizen's participation to give voice to the voiceless in order to jointly create more sustainable, equitable, egalitarian and inclusive cities for all.
- Enhancing the citizens “Right to the City”, and in particular the right of women to an effective participation in all issues related to sustainable development, including their leadership in decision-making at all levels. Only in that way can we create cities with the necessary territorial, social and economic balance on equal terms and opportunities for all.





### 03 Innovation and knowledge laboratories

Cities have become centers of talent, knowledge and innovation and have demonstrated their capacity to find innovative solutions to specific problems. Most cities have multicultural features, the capacity for social inclusion and the potential for economic development. Innovation and knowledge are essential tools to achieve a transforming global agenda and to create more sustainable and inclusive cities. Local governments can lead this transformation, but it is necessary to:

- Develop and strengthen cross-cutting and multisectoral actions to define integrated and sustainable urban development policies.
- Enhance the role of local authorities to establish the necessary collaborative inter-administrative framework and create alliances with the private sector and the civil society in order to jointly design common comprehensive strategic interventions.

### *Why do we want a change in global governance?*



### 04 Unity among local and regional governments at the global level

The internationalization of local and regional governments will be a key element to adequately implement the New Urban Agenda. Both levels of government have demonstrated their capacity for collaboration and interaction by creating global collaboration networks among cities and regions that allowed them to build a united and independent voice. Thus, we need to:

- Acknowledge and strengthen the internationalization processes of cities and regions to work in strong complementarity with national governments and international bodies.
- Enhance the policy dialogue and strengthen the networking and the “city-to-city” and regional cooperation to develop strategies for sustainable development and establish priorities for the New Urban Agenda.



### 05 The urban era as a cross-cutting and global issue

It is essential for local governments and society in general to be involved in sustainable urban development with a global strategic perspective and to coordinate their actions beyond the local level, enabling their dialogue with the UN, development banks and other international bodies, to:

- Foster sustainable urban development including a cross-cutting approach in national policies, which demands for the interaction of urban issues with other public policies.
- Define new and innovative financial mechanisms and tools to access financial resources at the local and regional levels in order to develop urban interventions.



### 06 For a paradigm shift in global governance

The global governance system is no longer adequate to address the existing challenges the world is facing because these challenges are at the same time more global and local. Therefore, it is necessary to:

- Develop an urban agenda based on co-existence, equity, proximity and resolution of the specific concerns of the citizens, from their closest level of government.
- A shift in the global governance system towards a more horizontal and democratic model, improving the inter-administrative coordination at all levels and making it closer to the needs and requirements of the citizens.



## Our call for an Action Plan



### 07 A seat at the global table: two complementary approaches

Habitat III offers a chance to define and discuss possible ways for local authorities to assume "A seat at the decision-making table of the global agenda". This is a live process that allows us to imagine two not-exclusive but complementary approaches:

- On one hand, strengthening and improving the role of local and regional governments within the international system. After Habitat III, their participation within the United Nations System should be strengthened through cooperation and dialogue among the different bodies to allow them to coordinate policies, programmes and projects promoting the positioning of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the field, while respecting the legitimate role of local and regional governments in accordance with their respective competences.
- On the other hand, strengthening the self-organization and self-integration of cities and local authorities at the global level by promoting the coordination of local public policies with a global approach and by engaging in specific commitments.



### 08 Central governments as allies for the internationalization of local affairs

National governments are a key element in the strategy to improve global governance and the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Cooperation and mutual recognition of the specific role of each institution among the administrations at central, regional and local levels are essential to develop effective comprehensive policies with a territorial, metropolitan and global approach, recognizing the democratic legitimacy of local authorities in decentralization processes to respond to the demands of the citizens. We, therefore, ask central governments to:

- Strengthen and improve legal processes and tools that boost the institutional and administrative skills of local, metropolitan and regional governments in international affairs by promoting a better multi-level coordination among the different administrative levels.
- Involve the Legislative and Parliamentary Powers to facilitate the action of local governments in international affairs and strengthen their capacities to face new urban and territorial challenges, providing legal certainty for their involvement in global agendas in general and the New Urban Agenda in particular.



### 09 Professionalization of local governments concerning international affairs

The successful implementation of the New Urban Agenda reside in the involvement of local governments and the creation of a space where their opinion is taken into account, from the design to the final evaluation and impact assessment of the interventions. We are aware of the need to improve the technical and professional skills of the cities, involving the youth as a key element for the future of our cities. Therefore, we, local governments, commit to:

- Accept the voluntary commitment to provide ourselves with public policies relating international relations with the necessary skills and professionalism within the legal and administrative possibilities of each city.
- Develop communication and public awareness-raising strategies about the importance of international relations among cities and regions to address the challenges facing humanity and our planet.



### 10 For a new statute within the United Nations System

The success of Habitat III will be determined by the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, which faces the development of mayor challenges but, at the same time, will create new opportunities, among them a new way of managing and organizing cities and metropolitan areas. We, therefore, ask for:

- Formalizing a new space for the interaction, cooperation and dialogue of local governments with the UN and other international bodies and agencies, which will imply a higher level of representativeness and capacity for participation in decision-making about sustainable development at the global level.
- Recognizing the World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments as a valid interlocutor with the UN in all issues related to sustainable development.

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