

Overall assessment of the Habitat III Policy Paper Frameworks

In addition to the specific feedback provided by the Global Taskforce on each of the ten Policy Paper Frameworks released on 4 January, UCLG would like to make a number of general observations on the contents of the Frameworks and on the evolution of the New Urban Agenda.

Going forward, it is vital that the Habitat III process develops a clear vision that goes beyond a sectoral approach to identify the overarching principles and priorities of the New Urban Agenda.

- It is important that all of the Policy Papers, and the New Urban Agenda as a whole, keep in mind the other international sustainable development agendas that have been adopted in recent months, particularly the **2030 Agenda** and the **Paris Climate Agreement**. Specific links and synergies should be sought with **Goal 11** of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements in terms of financing, and monitoring, and with **Goal 16** on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Local governments should not be faced with the task of interpreting and implementing the unclear priorities and mechanisms of multiple, conflicting international commitments and recommendations.
- We welcome the fact that there are specific Policy Units addressing the **Right to the City, urban spatial strategies, and municipal finance**, three issues that the GTF considers fundamental to the construction of sustainable cities and which should form the backbone of the New Urban Agenda.
- The principle of **local self-government** should be at the heart of the New Urban Agenda. There should be an explicit acknowledgement of the unique ability of local governments, as the level closest to people, to understand local needs, to target resources effectively, and to be held to account by their communities. Harnessing this capacity requires a **bottom up approach** to urban development, including a clear legal and fiscal decentralization framework based on the principle of subsidiarity. Decentralization, then, is not an end in itself. Rather, it represents a commitment to local democracy and an acknowledgement that there is **no one-size-fits all recipe** for sustainable development.
- We welcome the fact that citizen participation is mentioned in all papers and is now treated as a cross-cutting issue. Given this broad consensus, we would encourage a joint **reflection on the role of citizens in local democracy** to link and guide these recommendations. The New Urban Agenda requires a coherent vision of how local and national institutions can harness participation to create a new social contract in our cities and territories.
- It is not enough to call for local partnerships between local institutions, communities and the private sector. The New Urban Agenda must recognize the unique ability and legitimacy of local governments, as a democratically elected sphere of the state, to **bring together and balance all sectors and interests** to develop shared vision of city, and to play a **leadership role** in pursuit of the common good.

- While it is important that the New Urban Agenda addresses the shared challenges in all urban areas, the specific challenges and opportunities in metropolitan, peripheral, intermediary and small cities should not be forgotten. All types of local government must have the opportunity to participate in the development of National Urban Policies, not just their implementation so that they work for all parts of national **systems of cities**. A **territorial approach** is also essential in this regard; cities and urban settlements must be understood and in the context of their interdependent relationship with their surrounding rural areas.
- As well as promoting growth, economic policies should harness and protect local cultures, contribute to the empowerment of women and the inclusion of marginalized groups, reduce carbon emissions and protect local ecosystems, and aim to make local economies resilient to the fluctuations of national and global economic and financial systems. Local economic development strategies, in a context of regular predictable transfers and fiscal decentralization, are essential tools in order to balance this complex set of objectives.
- UCLG has long advocated for culture to be considered as the fourth pillar of sustainable development. The Policy Paper Frameworks do not yet recognize the potential of culture to drive sustainable development nor, indeed, the fact that a New Urban Agenda blind to local traditions, practices and values will be doomed to failure.