

Monday, 15 February 2021

Summary of the UCLG Policy Council Meetings 2021: 8-12 February 2021

The resounding message of the 2021 United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) Policy Council meetings was aptly formulated by Linda Voortman, Utrecht, the Netherlands, and Co-Chair of the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy, and Human Rights: “Although cities and regions each have their unique characteristics, there are key challenges common to all.” Many speakers throughout the Policy Council meetings emphasized that although local governments are at the forefront of responding to pressing challenges, such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, they often face constraints limiting their ability to respond to peoples’ needs.

Knowledge exchange and transnational cooperation present fruitful avenues for identifying pathways to overcome these challenges. In this regard, the UCLG Policy Councils provide an important space for political decision makers to exchange views on key issues of importance for subnational governments. Policy Council discussions serve to chart out a common vision among UCLG members and trigger the mandating of concrete developments, such as drafting joint political declarations or policy papers. UCLG’s five Policy Councils address: right to the city and inclusive territories; culture and city diplomacy; territorial multilevel governance and sustainable financing; safe, resilient and sustainable cities; and implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA).

Key points that emerged during this year’s Policy Council meetings included:

- using the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to address bottlenecks in multi-level governance, notably related to the fragmentation of competencies, a lack of coordination, and complicated funding schemes;
- tackling the limitations to public service provision brought to light by the pandemic, especially in relation to vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities and children with special education needs;
- engaging local governments in the development of national recovery packages, including in decisions related to long-term investments;
- developing shared cross-party visions for the future of cities and the urban-rural continuum;

- acknowledging the critical role of culture in creating a sense of community and developing innovative tools for making cultural activities more accessible; and
- conceptualizing resilience more broadly, notably to encompass notions of social cohesion.

The Policy Council meetings convened from 8-12 February in a virtual format due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Brief History of UCLG

Building on the legacy of the century-old international movement of municipal partnerships, UCLG was founded in 2004 to ensure subnational and regional governments and other local authorities have a voice in the international processes defining the sustainable development and climate change agendas. UCLG defends the interests of local governments on the world stage and provides a platform to advance dialogue, cooperation, and knowledge sharing to empower communities at the local level.

The UCLG governing structure centers on three bodies: an Executive Bureau that meets twice a year, a World Council that meets every year, and a General Assembly that meets during the triennial UCLG Congress. Since 2010, the Congress has also been known as the World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders. UCLG has a World Secretariat, located in Barcelona, Spain, and seven regional sections. The UCLG World Council can mandate

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the creation of Policy Councils, Committees, Working Groups, Communities of Practice, and Fora to enhance participation and facilitate networking among UCLG members on specific themes. The Policy Councils provide an opportunity for political representatives to participate in policymaking and voice their views before the governing bodies. They report to each Executive Bureau session. Currently, there are five Policy Councils:

- Right to the City and Inclusive Territories
- Opportunities for All, Culture and City Diplomacy: Keys to Sustainable Development and Peace
- Territorial Multilevel Governance and Sustainable Financing
- Safer, Resilient and Sustainable Cities, Capable of Facing Crises
- Implementation of the NUA

UCLG Founding Congress: In May 2004, mayors and elected city and regional representatives gathered in Paris, France, to establish UCLG, with a view for it to be the united voice and world advocate of democratic local self-government. The final declaration of the founding Congress addressed sustainable development, decentralization and local democracy, cooperation and diplomacy, world health, and information technologies.

Second UCLG Congress: At UCLG's second Congress, held in October 2007 in Jeju, Republic of Korea, participants discussed the consequences of urbanization, cooperation with regions, and challenges of tomorrow's city. The final declaration lays out commitments on global warming and environmental protection, human rights, peace and development, and the Millennium Development Goals. In addition, a policy paper on local finance was approved.

Third UCLG Congress: First World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders: In November 2010 in Mexico City, Mexico, the Congress met as the World Summit for the first time, and adopted a document titled *The City of 2030 – Our Manifesto*. The Manifesto lays out the common goals of local leaders and their determination to make the urban world a better place.

Fourth UCLG Congress: Second World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders: Held in October 2013 in Rabat, Morocco, the second World Summit celebrated the centenary of the international municipal movement and allowed participants to debate and exchange views on the most vital issues for subnational authorities and partners. The Summit's outcome document, the Rabat Declaration, recognized the need to address change, innovation, and the issue of just societies by reinforcing bottom-up governance under the leadership of inclusive local and regional governments (LRGs).

Fifth UCLG Congress: Third World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders: The third World Summit convened in October 2016 in Bogotá, Colombia, under the theme "Local Voices for a Better World." The Summit approved the Bogotá Commitment and Action Agenda, which provides a guide for LRG actions in the follow-up to the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). It contains recommendations on: subnational contributions toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other global goals; reforming



Souad Ben Abderrahim, Mayor of Tunis, Tunisia

national legal, institutional and policy frameworks; and securing LRGs' rightful place at the table at the global level, especially in terms of global governance, international financing, and decentralized cooperation.

Sixth UCLG Congress: Fourth World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders: Held from 11-15 November 2019 in Durban, South Africa, this Summit approved the Durban Political Declaration on Envisioning the Future of Our Renewed International Municipal Movement. The Summit also approved a compendium of integrated policy recommendations resulting from a six-month consultation process with diverse stakeholders, which offered bottom-up continent and region-specific priorities.

2020 UCLG World Council and Executive Bureau Meeting: Held from 12-13 November 2020, this meeting convened under the theme "The Role of the International Municipal and Regional Movement in COVID Times." Key outcomes from the meeting included: the establishment of a UCLG International Solidarity Fund to strengthen local governance; the appointment of three new Ubuntu Advisors to contribute to expanding outreach with the UN and other stakeholders; and the establishment of a new Policy Council on Implementation of the NUA.

UCLG Policy Council Meetings Summary Report

This report provides a comprehensive overview of discussions held at the meetings of the UCLG Policy Councils. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the meetings took place virtually. Speakers joined from all around the world and UCLG provided interpretation in English, French, Spanish, and Russian. Meeting take-aways will serve as input for the more technical discussions taking place in the context of UCLG's Annual Retreat, convening virtually from 15-22 February 2021, and will be shared with the UCLG Regional Sections.

Opportunities for All, Culture and City Diplomacy: Keys to Sustainable Development and Peace

This Policy Council met on Monday, 8 February, and is co-chaired by: Souad Ben Abderrahim, Mayor of Tunis, Tunisia; Li Mingyuan, Mayor of Xi'an, China; and Jan van Zanen, Mayor

of The Hague, the Netherlands, President of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, and UCLG Co-President.

UCLG Secretary General Emilia Sáiz opened the meeting emphasizing this Policy Council, with its focus on city diplomacy for sustainable development, touches upon the very DNA of UCLG. She noted this is the first meeting of the Policy Council in its current composition and recalled the aim of all Policy Councils to provide a space for deliberation among diverse political voices and to trigger developments on key issues of importance for UCLG.

Co-Chair Ben Abderrahim underscored the importance of multilateral and multi-level cooperation for strengthening trust among partners and reducing the adverse effects of competition between cities. She emphasized cities as motors for producing locally viable solutions to global challenges and driving the sustainability transition.

Co-Chair Van Zanen highlighted the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened existing inequalities and constrained the capacity of local governments to support their struggling citizens. He noted the need to enhance synergies and cooperation with other initiatives aimed at fostering sustainable and peaceful development. He also pointed to the UCLG Peace Prize, which celebrates innovative local-level conflict prevention initiatives.

Vasu Gounden, Executive Director, African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, urged cities to develop conflict resolution processes. He said this is a necessity, as cities are emerging as the principal centers of governance, and growing urban populations will increase pressure on limited resources, heightening the risk of conflict. He urged considering the ways in which the interests of cities can be pursued concurrently with national and global interests in a conflict-free manner.

Frédéric Vallier, Secretary General, Council of European Municipalities and Regions, moderated the Policy Council panel discussion. He said culture can bring society together and help to develop more helpful and respectful societies, allowing for the inclusion and recognition of minorities.

José Manuel Ribeiro, Mayor of Valongo, Portugal, noted the importance of participatory networks to encourage dialogue and foster peace. He lamented the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the suspension of most activities, and urged restarting them as soon as is safe to do so. Ribeiro said education and culture are critical tools to foster growth and peace, stating opportunities for all cannot be realized without these. He reiterated peace as a continuous process, noting difficult questions need to be answered, including whether a peaceful society can live with the moral failure of not granting vaccine access to all.

André Viola, President, Aude Departmental Council, France, emphasized the need to support the cultural sector, which is at risk of disappearing amid the COVID-19 pandemic. He underscored the importance of decentralized cooperation between territorial authorities and pointed to new funding from the European Union (EU) to support local cooperation between EU cities and regions and regions across the world. He also called for translating the SDGs to the local level.

Noting the challenge of maintaining artistic and cultural activities during the pandemic, Vannesa Bohórquez López, Secretary of Culture of Mexico City, underscored the need to create new tools to create cultural bridges among communities and fight isolation. As promising developments, she pointed to cooperation between different Ibero-American cities to develop

a joint virtual platform for accessing cultural events, and to the 2020 Rome Charter on the right to participate fully and freely in cultural life, developed under the guidance of the UCLG Committee on Culture and the City of Rome.

Xabier Ochandiano, Bilbao, Spain, highlighted the importance of participatory processes to enhance stakeholder inclusiveness and noted the role of universities in supporting this.

Féthi Riah, Grande-Synthe, France, outlined local challenges related to his city's industrial and cosmopolitan nature and as a hub for migrant and refugee routes to the United Kingdom (UK).

Qiang Sheng, Xi'an Municipal Government, China, said more effort needs to be made to achieve equality within and between countries. He noted increased regional instability during the pandemic and said mutual learning between communities, along with an attitude of inclusiveness, modesty, and equality can lessen conflict. He cited the City of Xi'an as an example where different cultures have peacefully coexisted.

Onur Eryüce, Izmir, Turkey, said the fourth UCLG Culture Summit, to be hosted in September 2021, will provide an opportunity to discuss culture in the COVID-19 era, and exchange views on how to shape culture policies in the coming years. He stressed culture as an important factor to achieve social inclusion and cohesion.

Kristiina Hämäläinen, Vice-President of the Päijät-Häme Regional Council, Finland, advocated for discussions on marketing arts and cultural services, getting communities involved in the sector, and making the sector more accessible to all. She posited that municipalities could take a leading role, potentially partnering with the private sector to increase accessibility. She underscored that every citizen should be able to access culture, regardless of their background.

Closing the meeting, Secretary General Sáiz pointed to interlinkages between issues raised in the Policy Council and work of UCLG Committees, noting the Committee on Culture is advancing work on implementing the Rome Charter and plans on addressing linkages between culture and climate change. Building on members' suggestions, she indicated that future Policy Council sessions will focus on specific topics to allow for more in-depth discussions.

Right to the City and Inclusive Territories

This Policy Council convened on Tuesday, 8 February, and is co-chaired by: Armand Béouindé, Mayor of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; Claudia López, Mayor of Bogotá, Colombia; and Philippe Rio, Mayor of Grigny, France.

UCLG Secretary General Sáiz opened the meeting, recalling the Policy Council is the result of long-standing partnerships with civil society organizations and that, in its previous composition, it had triggered UCLG discussions on housing, digital rights, and human mobility and migration. Pointing to UCLG's work on developing a "Pact for the Future," she highlighted discussions held in the Policy Council will shape the Pact's axis of "Caring for People."

Co-Chair Rio stressed climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic increases the precariousness of vulnerable communities and stated local governments are at the forefront of responding to these challenges. He emphasized the value of the 2011 UCLG Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City and noted

the objective to revise the charter ahead of the seventh UCLG Congress in Daejeon, Republic of Korea, in 2022.

Co-Chair Béouindé stated the COVID-19 pandemic presents an unprecedented situation, giving rise to new forms of inequality and is affecting an increasing number of people. He emphasized local governments need to enhance their capacity to act and highlighted that cooperation in the context of the UCLG can contribute to this.

Todd Howland, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), observed that although the issue of human rights is typically thought of as a matter for national governments, including because human rights law is developed through intergovernmental action, local governments play a key role in ensuring human rights are implemented in practice. He welcomed the partnership between the OHCHR and UCLG as a valuable opportunity to identify good practices, better understand challenges, and ultimately contribute to improving respect for human rights globally.

Hannes Lagreliu, World Blind Union, underscored that true inclusion cannot be achieved without ensuring accessibility. He outlined the many frameworks addressing this issue, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the SDGs, and the UCLG Policy Paper on Inclusive and Accessible Cities. He said UCLG action on this issue can inspire its members to act accordingly. He closed stating the COVID-19 pandemic provides a window of opportunity to lift universal accessibility to its rightful place on the global agenda.

Jean-Pierre Elong Mbassi, Secretary General of UCLG Africa, facilitated the panel discussion. He said human rights are manifested at the city and territory levels, and all policies and action should have accessibility and inclusivity at their heart.

Mohamed Aydi, Deputy Mayor of Sfax, Tunisia, lamented minimal democratic experience in his city following many years of dictatorship. He called for engaging with other cities to learn and share experiences, lauding the Policy Council for providing such an opportunity.

Laia Bonet, Deputy Mayor of Barcelona, Spain, called for changing the foundations of our society and pushing for the recognition of a “new generation” of rights, including digital and biodiversity rights. She emphasized the rights agenda is empowering, makes policy objectives easily understandable, and charts out a clear pathway for change.

Àstrid Desset i Desset, Mayor of Anglès, Spain, expressed support for working on a political declaration on inclusive territories and human rights. As issues of importance, she emphasized, among others: fighting against discrimination at all levels; ensuring decent housing for all; and enhancing mechanisms for integrating undocumented migrants in education and the labor market. She noted people are fleeing cities towards rural areas and that the social fabric is threatened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Carola Gunnarsson, Mayor of Sala, Sweden, underscored the gendered impacts of the pandemic and called for ensuring women have the same human rights as men, including living free of violence, access to education and economic opportunities,



Carola Gunnarsson, Mayor of Sala, Sweden

and participation in political decision making. She said gender equality is about more than giving opportunities to any individual woman, and requires reforming laws and policies and investing in women’s organizations. She highlighted, among others, the need to support local and regional leaders in standing up for human rights.

Salvatore Martello, Mayor of Lampedusa, Italy, recalled his city is known as “the gateway to Europe, the destination of thousands of migrants.” Emphasizing the importance of defending the human rights of each person, preventing unjust detention, and supporting local communities in border regions, he urged developing a common political declaration inspired by the Global Compact on Migration. He called for tackling hate speech and fostering international cooperation based on solidarity, including addressing the factors that push people to leave their countries.

Catarina Vaz Pinto, Lisbon, Portugal, emphasized UCLG’s role in creating common ground, shifting discourses, and shaping policies in cities around the globe, particularly regarding the role of culture in sustainable development. He called for the “Pact for the Future” to highlight the need for universal access to culture.

Linda Voortman, Utrecht, the Netherlands, and Co-Chair of the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy, and Human Rights, said that despite cities’ differences, key challenges are common to us all. She said human rights are integral to building back better post-COVID-19, and urged taking advantage of the increased momentum on this issue.

Büyükgöz Zinnur, Mayor of Gebze, Turkey, noted his city strives to protect human rights. He said legal frameworks are key to ensuring human rights and must be mindful of national and international laws.

Pedro del Cura, Mayor of Rivas-Vaciamadrid, Spain, lamented that many households in his city still lack access to basic services and urged sharing knowledge and experiences to address these challenges.

In closing, Secretary General Sáiz said the UCLG Annual Retreat will consider how to further build on the 2011 UCLG

Charter-Agenda on Human Rights in the City and the 2014 Charter of Lampedusa. She said the Retreat will also address new concepts, such as digital rights, and the evolving definition of citizenship given, among others, the migrant crisis.

Territorial Multilevel Governance and Sustainable Financing

This Policy Council convened on Wednesday, 10 February, and is co-chaired by: Pablo Jurado, President, Consortium of Provincial Autonomous Governments from Ecuador; Geoff Makhubo, Mayor of Johannesburg, South Africa; and Núria Marín, President, Barcelona Provincial Council, Spain.

Opening the meeting, Co-Chair Jurado emphasized the need for cooperation between different levels of government as well as between cities and rural areas.

Noting that his city of Prince George, Canada, is situated on the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, Garth Frizzell, President, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, highlighted that local authorities are chronically underfunded. He called for a more balanced distribution of national resources to enhance financial capacity at the local level and support investments for updating water and recreational infrastructure, especially in underserved communities.

Pilar Díaz Romero, Mayor of Esplugues de Llobregat, Spain, noted the need for increased advocacy on the importance of multi-level governance and the role of local governments therein. She delineated her region's efforts to address challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted that "we don't want to go back to the old normal."

Philipp Rode, Executive Director, London School of Economics Cities, said challenges are increasingly framed as complex emergencies, noting these are characterized by, among others: a high degree of uncertainty; trade-offs; delayed effects of disasters and of actions; and strong opposition due to vested interests. He highlighted that emergency situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, lead to a changing power distribution among government and private actors, fluctuating trends of privatization as well as de-privatization, shifting expenditure

priorities, and loss of income for local governments. He underscored emergency governance needs to acknowledge the scale of the problem, center on social justice and empathy, and embrace a systems approach.

Ahmed Aziz Diallo, Mayor of Dori, Burkina Faso, underscored the importance of ensuring local authorities have sufficient capacity to respond appropriately to challenges and noted the importance of knowledge sharing in this regard. He lamented local authorities are increasingly being asked to do more with less. He underscored that the role of local authorities is going to become increasingly important for safety and security in unstable regions.

Octavi de la Varga Mas, Secretary General, Metropolis, facilitating the session, said connecting with citizens and providing basic services cannot happen without prioritizing proper governance at the local level. He noted multiple perspectives are key to achieving this and stated the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted traditional modes of governance, with local leaders needing to be "very creative" to adequately respond to the pandemic.

Emilio Jatón, Mayor of Santa Fe de la Vera Cruz, Argentina, called for multi-level dialogue and decision making, covering all aspects of governance. He said citizens must be placed at the heart of policymaking, and objectives should be in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He outlined the importance of reinforcing networks with, among others, international organizations to respond better to the current pandemic.

David Jackson, UN Capital Development Fund, said subnational levels of government are critical for transformation, particularly in developing countries. He called for subnational level capital markets, highlighting the difficulty for subnational entities to raise capital at global market rates. He stressed that flexible financing across all departments at the local level is needed to meet social objectives, noting national government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have lagged behind those of local governments. He urged looking beyond "bankable projects" towards more transformative projects financed through private and public means.

Santiago Saura Martínez de Toda, Madrid, Spain, underscored the importance of cross-party collaboration in outlining a shared vision for the COVID-19 recovery and the future of cities. He noted the current crisis has highlighted bottlenecks, notably related to the fragmentation of competencies, a lack of coordination, and complicated administrative funding schemes. He said cities must be included in developing recovery packages, underscoring the principle of subsidiarity. He highlighted the Policy Council's work as critical in setting the tone for the government axis of the UCLG Pact for the Future.

Çemal Bas, Municipality of Keçiören, Turkey, highlighted challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as decreased revenues, for example related to a decrease in public transportation usage, increased waste management costs, and



David Jackson, UN Capital Development Fund

water shortages. He called for attention to addressing tax avoidance by large monopolistic companies.

Steven Heddle, Orkney Islands, Scotland, UK, said the reliance on funding allocated by central governments constrains local-level action. He pointed to strong tensions related to the recentralization of powers in London, in the aftermath of the UK leaving the EU. He noted national governments displayed significant and swift mobilization efforts in the context of COVID-19, and urged similar efforts to address climate change.

Ástrid Desset i Desset, Mayor of Anglès, Spain, called for more attention on small municipalities in the context of fostering a just transition and for revitalizing rural areas.

Barbara Samuels, Executive Director of the Global Clearinghouse for Development Finance, and UCLG Ubuntu Advisor, underscored that suppliers of development finance increasingly see cities as the battlegrounds for successful projects. She proposed cementing UCLG's role as the mandated institution to advocate for this in the multi-stakeholder financing space at the UN. To achieve this, she proposed developing a policy paper that defines the priorities, instruments, and tools for local development finance and provides constructive, pragmatic solutions. She said such a policy paper could be used in major high-level dialogues and when addressing specific institutions, to show how the localization of finance contributes to achieving the SDGs.

Closing the session, UCLG Secretary General Sáiz recalled the upcoming Annual Retreat will further discuss issues raised during the Policy Council session, including on how to finance "the green future that we want to see." She said other issues to be discussed would include: how to localize governance strategies; how to transform local finance; and the rural-urban continuum and how this relates to mobility and population dynamics. Policy recommendations, she noted, will be developed prior to the World Council to be held at the end of 2021.

Safer, Resilient and Sustainable Cities, Capable of Facing Crises

This Policy Council convened on Thursday, 11 February, and is co-chaired by: Fatimetou Abdel Malick, President of Nouakchott Regional Council, Mauritania; Johnny Araya, Mayor of San José, Costa Rica, Co-President of UCLG; and Sami Kanaan, Mayor of Geneva, Switzerland.

UCLG Secretary General Sáiz opened the meeting, highlighting that the work of the Policy Council not only relates to disaster preparedness but, more broadly, to changing our relationship with ecosystems and shifting development models. She noted the concept of "safer" cities goes beyond security aspects and also relates to social cohesion.

Co-Chair Araya said the COVID-19 pandemic, having disastrous consequences on poverty reduction efforts, underscores the need for comprehensive visions of the concept of resilience rather than those centered solely on climate change.

Co-Chair Kanaan called for more operational work on the issue of resilience. He proposed hosting a meeting of the UCLG Permanent Working Group on Territorial Prevention

and Management of Crises, which he co-chairs, in Geneva, as soon as health restrictions are lifted. He emphasized UCLG could leverage Geneva's position as a hub for international organizations for advocacy purposes.

Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Head of the UN Office for DRR (UNDRR), noted that the COVID-19 pandemic, as with all disasters, hit vulnerable communities the hardest. She said the challenges to building more resilient cities are clear and not new. To overcome them, she stressed the need to reduce the root causes of risks, invest in risk governance, and develop multi-hazard approaches. She delineated UNDRR's Making Cities Resilient 2030 initiative, which, recognizing cities are at different steps in the pathway to resilience, aims to support cities in: enhancing knowledge on risk and resilience; putting in place DRR strategies; and implementing actions to strengthen resilience. She indicated progress of this initiative will be monitored and measured in an online dashboard that has already been launched.

Bernadia Irawati Tjandradewi, Secretary General of UCLG Asia-Pacific, highlighted that COVID-19 is a cross-cutting issue going beyond being a health sector crisis and also affects economies and society at large. She urged putting risk mitigation at the forefront of local responses so "we can build back better and faster."

Almudena Maíllo, Madrid, Spain, and Secretary General, Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities, stated reducing inequalities and improving social inclusion is key to building resilient cities. She underscored the tourism sector as a vehicle for sustainability, growth, and resilience, noting it can also be a tool to fight inequality and encourage social inclusion. Maíllo lamented, however, the sector has suffered during the pandemic and urged a shift from promoting "higher quantity tourism" towards supporting "higher quality tourism." She suggested a partnership be formed between UCLG and the UN World Tourism Organization.



Bernadia Irawati Tjandradewi, Secretary General of UCLG Asia-Pacific

Fernando Gray, Mayor of Esteban Echeverría, Argentina, said cities are at the forefront of responding to crises, including COVID-19, and suggested reinforcing local-level capacities to better respond to these. He underscored the importance of networks of local authorities to improve capacity and increasing the visibility of the value of local authorities' actions in times of crisis.

Rob Metz, Mayor of Soest, the Netherlands, spoke on the work of the UCLG Working Group on Territorial Prevention and Management of Crises and of the UCLG International Solidarity Fund Chart. He said “building back better” is essential to the work of the Solidarity Fund and suggested appointing a representative from the Policy Council to liaise with the Making Cities Resilient 2030 initiative.

Mohamed Sefiani, Mayor of Chefchaouen, Morocco, President of the UCLG Forum of Intermediary Cities, said a significant portion of the world's population lives in intermediary cities, which have populations of between 50,000 and one million people. He said these cities present unique challenges made apparent during the COVID-19 lockdowns. He, thus, underscored the need to work on, among others: mobility between cities; decentralizing health infrastructure; digital transformation in the education sector; and supporting local economic development that prioritizes social profitability instead of only economic profits. He lamented the centralized approach of many pandemic recovery programmes, and underscored the need for a green recovery.

Francisco Toajas, Mayor of Las Cabezas de San Juan, Spain, said emergency policies can only be effective if they are well understood by citizens. He highlighted limitations to public service provision in the context of the pandemic, noting lack of attention to vulnerable groups, such as children with special education needs, and underscored the importance of partnerships with civil society organizations to fill these gaps.

Jennifer Ramírez Porrás, Terrassa, Spain, shared her city's experience in developing disaster management protocols, notably

pointing to the mapping of urban infrastructure and to the use of simulation tools for enhancing crisis coordination mechanisms.

Abd Dayem Navae, Nouakchott, Mauritania, on behalf of Policy Council Co-Chair Abdel Malick, lamented the lack of services in his city and noted challenges in accessing funding, which hinders the local government's ability to improve citizens' quality of life. He cited food insecurity as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that closing national borders had limited access to food and international aid.

José Dionisio González, International Union of Public Transport, underscored the great opportunity to build back better, stating “we cannot quarantine climate change... social inequality... the SDGs.” He underscored public transport as an enabler of a better quality of life, saying the benefits of public transport are five times higher than the initial investment. For a sustainable public transport system, he urged, among others, a strong common vision, effective governance, stable long-term funding, and ambitious political leadership.

Closing the session, Secretary General Sáiz summed up key points raised, including the need to discuss jobs in sustainable tourism, and that transportation is not just about “moving people,” but is also a vital contributor to food security in isolated regions. She emphasized the second UN Global Sustainable Transport Conference and the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit as key forums related to the work of the Council. Pointing to the Glasgow Climate Change Conference, scheduled for the end of 2021, she said discussions will not only relate to the “race to zero emissions,” but also the “race to resilience.”

Implementation of the New Urban Agenda

This Policy Council convened on Friday, 12 February, and is co-chaired by: Carlos Martínez Mínguez, Mayor of Soria, Spain, Envoy of the UCLG Presidency on the NUA; Ilsur Metshin, President of the UN Advisory Committee for Local Authorities (UNACLA); and Thembisile Nkadimeng, Mayor of Polokwane, South Africa, President of the South African Local Government Association, and UCLG Co-President.

UCLG Secretary General Emilia Sáiz opened the meeting, recalling the creation of this Policy Council as one of the key outcomes of the November 2020 UCLG World Council meeting. She emphasized the urban era is not just about big cities, but territoriality in all its aspects, including intermediary cities and the urban-rural continuum. It is about “leaving no one... and no place... behind,” she said.

Co-Chair Metshin delineated the role of UNACLA as a liaison platform for strengthening dialogue between local authorities and the UN System in relation to the NUA. He recalled the UN Secretary-General's report on progress made in implementing the NUA is due in 2022. He encouraged local authorities and UCLG to actively participate in the preparation of national reports to inform it.

Co-Chair Martínez Mínguez said territorial perspectives should guide NUA implementation, noting the role of small and



José Toajas, Mayor of Las Cabezas de San Juan, Spain



Sergio Arredondo, Latin American Federation of Cities

medium cities in the energy transition. He called for creating a mechanism for citizen participation in the work of UCLG.

Co-Chair Nkadimeng underscored the need to foster inclusive local service provision and ensure accessibility for women.

Elkin Velásquez, UN-Habitat, said much related to the NUA implementation review occurs at the regional level. In relation to the SDGs, he encouraged local authorities to conduct Voluntary Local Reviews as a means to better feed local perspectives into Voluntary National Reviews. “We need to think long term while acting in the short term” he said, calling for leveraging the new openness for innovation brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sergio Arredondo, Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities, and Associations, facilitated this discussion. He urged this Policy Council to assist in supporting local authorities by, among others, sharing knowledge and experiences and helping replicate actions that have been successful elsewhere.

Damià Calvet, Catalonia Regional Government, Spain, cautioned that while some national policies managed to support urban sustainability and the right to the city, others proved to be hindrances. He called for a multi-level and territorial approach to urban sustainable development as “regions cannot be left behind if there is to be success.”

Peter Kurz, Mayor of Mannheim, Germany, said international agreements have thus far not managed to achieve their goals and transform the world as they promised, reiterating the importance of the UN Decade of Action to achieve the SDGs. He said local-level governments must be a partner in both developing and implementing policies, lamenting the pandemic boosted centralization of powers. He called attention to the “Mannheim Message” where local-level EU leaders called for the EU Green Deal to be implemented with local governments as partners in a multi-level governance system.

Gabriel Cruz, Mayor of Huelva, Spain, said the results of Habitat I and II lacked sufficient impact in driving change and the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed this. Bemoaning that cities

are local recipients of regional and national policies but have played no role in defining policies, he said local governments are not in competition with other levels of governance, but should be considered partners in both defining and implementing policy.

Berry Vrbanovic, Mayor of Kitchener, Canada, underscored the contribution of cities and communities of all sizes to delivering on international and national goals, notably for ending homelessness. He said funding mechanisms should be streamlined and decentralized to empower local authorities. Pointing to the work of the World Council on City Data, he underscored the need for disaggregating data, among others, between cities and rural areas, as well as by gender, age, and race, to ensure no one is left behind and to allow for better assessments of policy effectiveness. He called for gender equality to be a guiding principle for COVID-19 recovery measures.

Nicolas Tumminaro, Mercociudades, drew attention to constraints in local autonomy, notably in terms of financial capacity, and highlighted the importance of conducting stakeholder consultations and working with research institutions.

Co-Chair Nkadimeng noted local governments are often viewed as “junior partners” and this Policy Council can elevate their profile and concomitantly their role in policymaking and implementation. She called for highlighting linkages between the NUA and the SDGs, particularly SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities). She said monitoring and evaluation should be done in cooperation with local governments as they are closer to the people.

Edgar Pieterse, Director, African Centre for Cities, and UCLG-Ubuntu Advisor, underscored that while sufficient momentum exists to accelerate urban governance, “we’re not thinking hard enough about disruptive opportunities.” He stated the radical change required cannot be achieved without fundamentally changing current systems—systems that have not had sufficient success. He suggested bringing all parts of society together to create plans and mechanisms aimed at achieving change. Pieterse



Edgar Pieterse, Director, African Centre for Cities, UCLG-Ubuntu Advisor

UCLG Secretary General **Emilia Sáiz**

also underscored the need to include youth in developing urban policy.

Closing the session, Secretary General Sáiz noted many speakers pointed to the Policy Council on Territorial Multilevel Governance and Sustainable Financing as a group to exchange with. She shared her intention to bring the different Policy Councils together to help shape UCLG inputs to the NUA review.

Upcoming Meetings

Fifth Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5): UNEA-5 will take place under the theme “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the SDGs.” It is expected to adopt a “two-step” approach with a first virtual meeting in February 2021, complemented by a second component in the form of a resumed UNEA-5 to be held in person in Nairobi, Kenya, in February 2022. **dates:** 22-23 February 2021 **location:** online **www:** <https://environmentassembly.unenvironment.org/unea5>

5th World Forum of Local Economic Development: Postponed to 2021 due the pandemic, the 5th World Forum on Local Economic Development will address three thematic tracks: the territory as a basis of social, economic and environmental innovation; territorial economic and production models to tackle inequality; and the future of work and the work of the future from a territorial perspective. The Forum, hosted by Córdoba, Argentina, will provide a platform to exchange ideas on these issues and address how to localize the 2030 Agenda. **dates:** 26 May – 1 June 2021 **location:** online **www:** <https://ledworldforum.org/>

World Cities Summit: Postponed to 2021 due the pandemic, the biennial World Cities Summit, originally planned for 2020, will convene under the theme “Liveable and Sustainable Cities: Adapting to a Disrupted World.” The Summit, which will include the World Cities Summit Mayors Forum, is expected to address the ways in which cities can adapt to growing challenges posed by climate change, social shifts, and new technology. **dates:** 20-24 June 2021 **location:** Singapore **www:** <https://www.worldcitiessummit.com.sg/>

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF): The ninth session of the HLPF will take place over eight days in July 2021 under the theme “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, that promotes the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: Building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.” **dates:** 6-15 July 2021 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York (TBC) **www:** <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021>

2021 UN Food Systems Summit: Convened as part of the Decade of Action to achieve the SDGs by 2030, the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit will hold discussions on transforming the way the world produces and consumes food, and how this contributes to delivering progress on the SDGs. Discussions will be guided by five action tracks: ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all; shift to sustainable consumption patterns; boost nature-positive production; advance equitable livelihoods; and build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks, and stress. **dates:** September 2021 (TBD) **location:** New York, US **www:** <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit>

UCLG Culture Summit 2021: The UCLG Culture Summit 2021 is being held in response to the growing recognition of the importance of culture in local development. It will provide a platform for stakeholders to discuss the current position of culture in the global agenda and send a strong message that culture is an integral part of sustainable cities. **dates:** 9-11 September 2021 **location:** Izmir, Turkey **www:** <http://www.agenda21culture.net/summit/uclg-culture-summit-2021>

Second UN Global Sustainable Transport Conference: The second UN Global Sustainable Transport Conference will be held in Beijing, China in 2021. It will identify opportunities, challenges and solutions to achieve sustainable transport objectives and address how sustainable transport can help achieve the SDGs. It will also follow up on the first Global Sustainable Transport Conference, held in 2016 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. **dates:** tbd 2021 **location:** Beijing, China **www:** <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/transport2020>

Glossary

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| DRR | Disaster Risk Reduction |
| EU | European Union |
| LRGs | Local and Regional Governments |
| NUA | New Urban Agenda |
| OHCHR | Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| UCLG | United Cities and Local Governments |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UNACLA | United Nations Advisory Committee for Local Authorities |