

UN HABITAT

FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Commonwealth Local Government Conference

Kampala, Uganda 14 – 17th May 2013

Keynote speaker: Dr Joan Clos, Executive Director, UN Habitat.

TALKING POINTS

Innovations in local government: how greater local democracy and community engagement is resulting in better services, economic growth and sustainable development.

Introductory remarks – the importance of local government

- Today I stand before you as both a past Mayor, and now as the Executive Director of UN Habitat - the United Nations body that is the voice of local authorities in the UN system.
- The main theme of this Conference could not be more relevant, “Putting local government at the heart of development” recognizes the role that municipalities have played in delivering basic urban services without which development could not be possible, such as water, sanitation, transport, employment opportunities, protection of the environment, access to public space, amongst others.
- The importance of local governments in the development agenda arrives in a historic moment when the United Nations System is defining what will be the next Development agenda for post 2015. The Rio +20 declaration is already an important step forward for the recognition of the role of local governments in development as an integrated and complementary part of the public responsibility to deliver urban services locally as well as to contribute to increasing democracy and participation at local level.

In this sense, municipalities are the perfect space for local democracy and community participation. The Brazilian participatory budgeting has become a world-known example, but every day, in each city and town, citizens are getting more and more involved in daily management of public affairs, establishing new partnerships with neighbor associations, the academic and private sectors and other spheres of government – to ensure that local government can deliver essential services to their citizens.

- Similarly good intergovernmental relations play a critical role in effective governance at the local level. Consider and share examples of some of the formal or informal mechanisms which countries use to promote dialogue and the important role that local government associations can play in intergovernmental relations as the representative voice of local government nationally.

Versus a renewed international role – the opportunities of 2015 and Habitat III

- UN-Habitat has been working closely with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum within the context of the Global Taskforce of local and regional leaders, coordinated by UCLG, United Cities and Local Governments. The taskforce has elaborated a series of conclusions that are going to be presented at the end of the month to the Ambassadors to the United Nations in New York.
- One of the main conclusions of this Task Force is that a better functioning of the public sector involves the need of increasing Dialogue between the central and local spheres of government, as well as for better distribution of responsibilities and resources, both human and financial.
- In working with the local government associations, such as CLGF, UN-Habitat is contributing to raise the profile of local government and their associations at international level.
- In this sense, the big opportunity ahead is the upcoming Third United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat III) that will take place in 2016.
- We would like to invite all African countries to join the movement and prepare for Habitat III.

- Habitat III is the opportunity for local governments to participate, both at national and international level in the policy making of the urban agenda for the next 20 years.
- Although it is the Ministers of Foreign Affairs who sit in the negotiations of the Conference, the Habitat III foresees the creation of National Habitat Committees, a real instrument for the dialogue between different Habitat agenda partners, providing a long-term space for central and local governments to come together and identify and find solutions for urban issues.
- The conference will have a focus on reinvigorating the effort and focus on sustainable cities globally.

The challenge of urbanization

- It is remarkable that **only a century ago, two out of ten people in the world were living in urban areas**. Since then the world has been rapidly urbanizing.
- Around 2030 it is estimated that Africa's collective population will become 50% urban. Looking further ahead to 2040, approximately 1 billion people will be living in Africa's cities – this is almost equivalent to the population of the entire continent today.
- And let us take pause when we consider that today **there are more people under the age of 25 than ever before**, totaling nearly 3 billion or almost half of the total global population. **It is estimated that as many as 60% of all urban dwellers will be under the age of 18 by 2030.**
- When I look to the future then I see such potential. **Urbanization is a source of development** if it is planned, well governed, and supported with adequate finance, policies, and legislation. And youth are a key actor in this as they are the greatest asset that any country has.

Seizing the opportunities

- The challenges and opportunities that the urban future offers will require better governance mechanisms and more innovative strategies for urban and regional integration to enable cities to become more prosperous.

- National urban policies and enabling legislation for sustainable urbanization will be required to allow for planning in advance of population growth and densification, as will a focus on ensuring sufficient public space for infrastructure and community cohesion.
- And this is why I began my remarks referring to the experience and expertise sitting in this room today. **The solutions are here. Right now. Within our grasp. Within this room.**
- Together I believe we can bring to bear our collective knowledge and will to affect change from the local level to the international level.
- Your actions and discussions this week and through the campaign also resonate strongly with the challenges and opportunities across the globe.

Closing

- Honorable Ministers, Mayors, colleagues, and dear hosts. I look forward to listening through the course of this week to your opinions and inputs on how we can move forward together.
- We have the knowledge and resources here today and a unique opportunity to debate them in the course of this summit.
- I challenge us all to consider what we can as individuals do to harness the potential of urbanization.
- To do this we will need a strong voice of local authorities at all levels and processes of governance – from the international post-2015 debates and Habitat III, to other processes at the national and local levels.
- UN Habitat stands willing and ready to support you, to work with you and to champion your cause.
- I thank you for your attention this morning.