Building Political Commitment

Slums arrive on the global agenda

Recognizing urbanisation as an inevitable and positive reality, highlighting the importance of cities and local authorities in the social and economic success of a country, conferring upon the urban poor a full and meaningful urban citizenship, engaging slum dwellers as partners not problems, and adopting realistic, long-term planning frameworks – for many governments and development agencies alike, the Cities Alliance raises difficult policy questions.

HeidemarieWieczorek-Zeul, the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, President Nelson Mandela, Patron of the Cities Without Slums action plan and World Bank President, JimWolfensohn at the launch of the action plan, Berlin, December 1999.

Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums

"The CitiesWithout Slums initiative is a creative and daring response to urban poverty. Poverty reduction and upgrading of informal settlements will not be possible unless cities are productive and efficient, and capable of providing the poor with economic opportunities to build their assets and incomes," said President Nelson Mandela, Cities Without Slums Patron.

Building Political Commitment

Building political commitment requires a shared vision around which a consensus can be built and support mobilised. The Cities Without Slums action plan, which was launched at the inaugural meeting of the Cities Alliance's Consultative Group in Berlin in December 1999, conveys such a vision. The remarkable success of this initiative in mobilising political support is largely due to the fact that the patron of the Cities Without Slums action plan is one of the most powerful symbols of political will of the 20th century, Nelson Mandela.

The Cities Without Slums action plan has been endorsed at the highest political level internationally as a challenging vision with specific actions and a concrete target to improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable and marginalised urban residents. In his vision for the world organisation in the 21st century which set the agenda for the September 2000 Millennium Summit, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, strongly supported the Cities Without Slums action plan and asked all UN member states to endorse and act on it.[1]

The unique capacity of the United Nations to set global norms is reflected in the international development goals that have been adopted over the past decade. These goals, which establish measurable targets for poverty reduction and sustainable development, have been agreed to by the entire UN membership and will justifiably dominate the development agenda for the next decades.

At the UN Millennium Summit, which brought together 150 heads of state and government, the Cities Without Slums initiative was endorsed as a new international development target:

> ## We resolve further:
>
> *By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers as proposed in the "Cities Without Slums" initiative.*
>
> **Millennium Declaration**
> United Nations Millennium Declaration, A/RES/55/2 18 September 2000.

A number of Cities Alliance partners are leading the way to make sure that this new international development goal moves beyond the conference halls:

■ The Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting held in South Africa in November 1999 adopted as a target 'demonstrated progress towards adequate shelter for all with secure tenure and access to essential services in every community by 2015'.

■ The Global Campaign for Secure Tenure launched by UNCHS in Mumbai, India, in July 2000 has established a powerful normative mechanism to spearhead actions in support of this goal.

■ In its new urban strategy, Meeting the Challenge of Poverty in Urban Areas, the Government of the United Kingdom has strongly supported the Cities Alliance as a global partnership to achieve this goal.[2]

■ The World Bank has proposed that 'secure tenure' be used as a key indicator to measure progress in achieving the Cities Without Slums action plan.

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1   *"We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the Twenty-first Century"*, Report of the Secretary General to the Millennium summit, (A/54/2000, section IIID 'Upgrading the Slums', paragraphs 134-138)
2   DFID, *"Meeting the Challenge of Poverty in Urban Areas"* (April 2001)

Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums

Building Political Commitment

Jockin Arputham, President of the National Slum Dwellers Federation (of India) speaking at the Launch of the UNCHS Global Campaign for Secure Tenure. Mumbai 16 July 2000.

The untapped potential of the urban poor as developmental agents rather than recipients of assistance is clearly articulated in Hernando de Soto's *The Mystery of Capital* (Basic Books, 2000). It is their illegality and, in particular, their lack of property rights, which acts as a brake on their economic ability:

> *…the entrepreneurial ingenuity of the poor has created wealth on a vast scale – wealth that also constitutes by far the largest source of potential capital for development. These assets not only far exceed the holdings of the government, the local stock exchanges, and foreign direct investment; they are many times greater than all the aid from advanced nations and all the loans extended by the World Bank.*
>
> *H. de Soto, The Mystery of Capital, p. 34*

The interrelated objectives of unlocking the potential of the urban poor and achieving the Cities Without Slums goal require national leadership and clear national policy and legal frameworks, but ultimately depend on actions at the local level – by slum dwellers and local authorities working in partnership.

This new reality is well understood by both mayors and organisations of the urban poor in all regions:

> *…policies aimed at social inclusion need to go beyond mere sectoral approaches: the right to the city, based on the access to minimum social standards, requires the implementation of a set of integrated policies aimed at social inclusion.*
>
> *Celso Daniel, Mayor of Santo Andre, Brazil, describing Santo Andre's City Development Strategy, U.N. Chronicle No. 1, 2001.*

> *…we as citizens have to develop a new relationship with the city, our state government and business sectors… Our governments are no longer the only actors in development, and that means that both the state and civil society have to change the manner in which they relate to each other.*
>
> *Sheela Patel, at the 15th anniversary of the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres, Mumbai. The Society is an NGO **http://www.sparcindia.org** in alliance with Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dwellers Federation.*

> *Instead of focusing their energies on challenging the state through protest and demands for rights, organisations of the urban poor and their allies can achieve better results by initiating a grassroots-driven, non-hierarchical process of reclaiming the latent power of poor households and communities and using this to identify options and strategies to address their self-identified priority needs.*
>
> *The Brighter the Light, the Darker the Shadow: Backyard Fax, electronic newsletter of the Peoples Dialogue **http://www.dialogue.org.za**, Cape Town, South Africa, June 2001.*

The Cities Alliance has been inspired by civic leaders in all regions who are demonstrating the political will to invest in these opportunities.

Local Governments Responding to the Challenge of Globalisation

by Joan Clos, President, World Associations of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination

One of the more important, yet less visible, outcomes of the globalisation process is the emergence of local government as an increasingly coherent actor on the stage of world development. To close observers, however, this comes not as a surprise but as a logical outcome of two complementary trends – global moves towards democratisation and decentralisation, and the commitment of the international associations representing local authorities to develop a unified global voice for local government.

Although the decentralisation process continues to be uneven in some countries and regions, the global trend giving local governments more responsibility, along with more authority, has become very significant over the past two decades. The world has entered the urban millennium, and cities are on the front line of development.

It is not only the size and number of cities that have changed, but also the nature and complexity of the issues which they confront. For centuries past, towns and cities have essentially dealt with local issues, the priorities of a local community. Global issues are now also local issues.

Issues of the environment, economic growth, health care, the scourge of AIDS, poverty – all the major global issues are managed at the local level, as they are by other spheres of government. Towns and cities work within the framework of national policies but are the level of government most directly accountable for the provision of service and support to citizens.

Cities are also the incubators of innovation, and advances in information technologies are expanding their ability to learn from each other's experiences, good and bad. In different parts of the world, local governments have taken the lead in forging new ways of doing business – new ways of addressing the challenge of inclusion, of reaching out to the urban poor and of involving ordinary people in deciding city priorities.

Distorted allocations of resources, the rapid growth of poverty and the growing gap between the rich and poor are most visible at the local level. Most urban areas in Africa and throughout Asia, already struggling to manage their existing developmental challenges, are going to double in size within the next two decades. Yet, while most directly affected by the negative consequences of globalisation, local governments have traditionally been marginalised in the international developmental debate.

Over the last several years, the world's major international associations of local authorities have engaged in an elaborate and comprehensive process to strengthen their contribution to this global debate. By joining forces at the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities on the occasion of the UN Habitat II Conference in 1996, for the first time local authority associations acted and spoke with one voice with their global development partners. This process of unification was further strengthened during the local authority congresses in Barcelona in 1999, and again in Rio de Janeiro earlier this year. The World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities

Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums

Local Governments continued…

declaration that was adopted in Rio and presented to Kofi Annan at the Istanbul+5 meeting in New York, was a significant step in the United Nations recognising local authorities as indispensable partners. The Community Agenda which was adopted at the IULA-FMCU Unity Congress in Rio reflects another important outcome of this process – local authorities are now speaking with much greater clarity and unity of purpose about their role, and demonstrating a firm determination to take forward their responsibilities with the communities they represent.

As part of this wider process, the political heads of the world's major international associations of local authorities therefore welcomed the invitation of UNCHS and the World Bank in 1999 to create a new global alliance of cities with their development partners. We also welcomed the opportunity to work together, along with the 10 governments which helped establish the Cities Alliance, to negotiate and adopt its charter and governance structure.
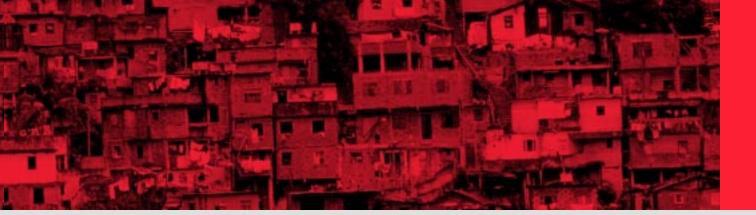
The Cities Alliance Consultative Group is providing us with a good opportunity to improve the impact of urban development cooperation. For the first time, local authority representatives are working as full partners with the representatives of the major bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies that manage international urban development assistance. The Alliance is helping to set a new standard in development cooperation.

Local authorities have also pledged their strong commitment to and engagement in achieving the goals of the Alliance as reflected in its charter. By linking efforts to make unprecedented improvements in the living conditions of the urban poor and to achieve the promise of well-managed cities, the Alliance is sharply focusing global support on two of the most critical issues facing local authorities. There are three specific aspects of the Alliance's strategy that particularly appeal to cities.

First, the approach to city development strategies which the Alliance is promoting is filling a critical gap in the ability of many cities to develop a shared vision and long-term strategy for their economic growth and the well-being of their citizens. The priorities for action which are established in this process also provide a framework for improving the coherence of investments and external support.

Second, the Alliance's Cities Without Slums action plan is providing Alliance partners with the opportunity to move beyond pilot projects to reduce urban poverty and tackle social exclusion on a city-wide scale. Successful cities have recognised that they must work with the urban poor in this process, and that scaling up is imperative if they are to have a realistic chance of meeting existing and future needs.

Third, we welcome the emphasis that the Cities Alliance puts on linking investments and investment partners to its activities. Civic leaders do not have the time or resources to engage in endless rounds of studies and discussions, and are committed to improving the efficiency of investing in the future of our cities. Cities and their associations intend to play an increasingly active role in helping the Alliance achieve these objectives.

THE COMMUNITY AGENDA

DECLARATION ADOPTED AT THE IULA-FMCU UNITY CONGRESS

RIO DE JANEIRO 6 MAY, 2001

We proclaim this Community Agenda as universal guidelines for men, women and all local governments, and commit ourselves to promoting these principles and to guaranteeing their implementation.

Article 1

All citizens have the right, and should be able, to access information and participate in decisions on issues concerning the management and development of their communities.

The strength and foundation of local government is our proximity to the citizens we serve. Public administration should be responsive to the priorities of the citizens. Local institutions should be led by authorities representing the interests of the majority of the citizens.

Article 2

All citizens have the right to elect, through a secret ballot, their local government representatives.

Appropriate means must be developed and made available to all citizens to ensure proper representation. Local and regional governments must ensure a secure atmosphere for citizens to express their opinion.

Article 3

Legally elected local representatives have the right and the duty to govern their communities within the mandate given to them by the community.

Local Government should be adequately recognised in the legislation on the governmental structures of the country, and relations with other spheres of government should be based on partnership, mutual respect and understanding. Local affairs should be managed by local governments, in the interest of their population. Constitutional frameworks should be supported by commensurate resources that allow local governments to take initiatives in local issues.

Article 4

It is the obligation of local representatives to be responsive and accountable for their actions, and citizens must be given the possibility to hold their local representatives to account.

Local government power must be legally and ethically based. Decision-making should be transparent and to this end consultation and feedback mechanisms should be developed. Public officials must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office and take decisions solely in terms of the public interest.

Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums

Article 5

Decisions should be taken in the sphere of government which is as close as practical to the citizens affected.

Local issues, and issues that will have consequences at local level, should be dealt with by, or in partnership with, Local Government and involving all community actors. Decision-making processes should be efficient and timely.

Article 6

A priority objective of local governments must be the optimal provision of high quality services at reasonable costs guaranteeing the broadest access possible.

Local governments commit themselves to high standards of public service, whether delivered directly, by contract, or through innovative public and private partnerships. Local governments must consistently improve their own capacity in planning and delivering services, taking into account the interests of the underprivileged.

Article 7

Local governments' work should aim to increase people's capacities and choices through the development of social capital as a way to ensure the well being of the present generation without jeopardising that of the future generations.

Sustainable development calls for an integrated approach linking environmental, economic, social and cultural aspects. Local government should develop partnerships within the framework of environmentally friendly policies and universal access to all services. All local governments committed to achieve reductions of greenhouse gas emissions should appeal to their national governments to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

Article 8

All citizens, men and women, should work to overcome all kinds of discrimination and arbitrary inequalities of treatment within the structures, processes and services of local government. Local governments should aim to ensure that their workforce reflects the ethnic and cultural balances of the populations they serve.

Democracy cannot be realised without the adequate representation, participation and inclusion of all citizens, men and women, in the local governance process. Local governments are committed to ensure that all children have a good start in life, complete a basic education of good quality and have the opportunity to develop their individual capacities in a safe and supportive environment. Equal access to decision-making and services should be ensured for all, as well as equal treatment in these services. Working for changes of attitudes by awareness-raising in the education system and within the political and administrative structure have proven to be a vital tool in integration and participation.

Article 8bis

Local Governments should be able to ensure, in liaison with other legally competent authorities, the security of those who live in their territory.

Within the competences recognised by the laws of their respective countries, Local Governments should be closely involved in the conception and implementation of crime prevention and control policies.

Article 9

Local governments have the right to unite in order to help each other in meeting their obligations towards local communities and to improve the representation and safeguarding of their interests at national, regional and international level.

Local, regional and international cooperation between local governments is of vital importance. Local governments all over the world basically share the same mandate. Partnerships based on a common institutional understanding and experience have not only proven to be effective, but have also led to sustainable improvements in the practices of the institutions involved. Regular channels of communications between authorities are becoming increasingly important in this globalised world.

We call upon the International Community to support Local Government in the values stated above, and we call upon local governments to develop this Agenda for the well-being of our communities, and to unite their strengths and work towards a united voice of local government.

Both IULA and UTO are contributing to this development through their Unification process. This is why we call upon local governments of the world to support and join us to build a strong and unified World Organisation of Local Government.

*This is an excerpt of the declaration adopted at the IULA-FMCU Unity Congress on May 6, 2001, in Rio de Janeiro. The full text may be found on the IULA website at **http://www.iula.org/**.*

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