



# UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights

## HABITAT III: ISSUE PAPER ON INCLUSIVE CITIES

### COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 1. First considerations

The Committee on Social Inclusion Participatory Democracy and Human Rights of United Cities and Local Governments is pleased to see the acknowledgement that the Task Team on Habitat III attributed to the issues of social inclusion and equal access to Human Rights in our contemporary cities.

As part of the world's largest association of Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), this committee is also glad to see how, each time more, **the crucial role of local governments to build inclusive cities** is being valued by the international community. Therefore, the CSIPDHR reiterates the need to stimulate policies to strengthen the work of these governments and clear barriers to conduct them towards inclusive and solidary cities.

#### 2. Specific Comments

- The document contains a very well detailed description of issues related to urbanization and social transformation, including **the very essential paradox contained in this concept**: on one hand, cities are major incubators of opportunities and connections between individuals and groups, which theoretically helps to increase access to services, social bonding, diversity and empowerment processes. On the other hand, it is mainly in cities where are found the most exacerbated conditions of inequalities, such as slum-like settlements and socially/economically excluded peripheries.
- The document also insists pertinently on the **multidimensional aspects of exclusion** and the intersection of various “forms of inequalities in the social, legal, spatial, cultural, political and environmental spheres, reinforcing deprivation and exacerbating further inequalities”. Those exclusion phenomena are threatening the cohesion among people and lead to the rise of racism and intolerance, stigmatizing certain groups. Moreover, the existence of such inequalities leads to more criminality and an unsafe environment.

- Furthermore, the document has a very critical view on the processes that generate exclusion, acknowledging the fact that the **current patterns of urban development** based on competitive cities, business attractiveness and “commodification of land and resulting speculation” **are not able to create a sustainable model of social inclusion and are rather exclusion-generators.**
- Thus, the document suggests two main drivers to tackle urban exclusion, which are (1) political commitment to inclusive urbanization and a (2) range of mechanisms and institutions to guarantee human rights for all.

### 3. Recommendations

- First of all, the Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights of UCLG recalls that the Habitat III Summit on Human Settlements aims to cover the thematic of human settlements as a whole. Although que issues on Habitats arise accurately in urban areas, we believe that the Habitat III Agenda is an opportunity to question more globally about the sustainability of the massive urbanization of the world. Therefore we suggest that, within the framework of its preparatory work, UN-Habitat question the urban model in relation to the rest of the non-urbanized planet, and explore the connections between policies for rural and urban development. It would be relevant to question in depth the viability of massive urbanization, and the cities' capacity to actually absorb the emancipatory aspirations of its people knowing that, as it is mentioned in the document, in most cases, there are major inequalities in the level of cities than in the level of the States.
- Moreover, when the Issue Paper refers to the inequalities and the way in which the exclusion factors reinforce each other, it seems important to describe the way in which these multiple exclusions affect the physical territory of the city, fragmenting the urban space with barriers. We note that this urban fragmentation is not only suffered by the poorest, since it is also created by the tendency to retreat and enclosure by the wealthiest member of the society. This affects the intrinsic communal nature of the city. Therefore we believe that the way to create the city as a common space in a just, democratic and sustainable manner is by guaranteeing concretely the **Right to the City for all.**
- In this context, the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights recalls the importance to recognize the Right to the City in the New Urban Agenda, as an individual and collective right for all inhabitants. **In this context, the territories of the cities and their hinterlands are considered as spaces for the exercise and fulfillment of rights,** in order to ensure that people have access to the resources, services, goods and opportunities that the city brings in a fair, universal, democratic and sustainable way.
- Therefore, **the Right to the City is a cross cutting approach,** which would enrich many aspects in the New Urban Agenda, in every policy recommendations. Among other principles, it stands for:
  - Cities where human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled for all inhabitants;

- Democratic, transparent, and participatory cities based on citizens' empowerment;
- Cities as common goods for all inhabitants, where human rights take precedence over the process of privatization and speculation, which inevitably lead to the exclusion of the majority of the population, and where the rehabilitation of historic centers and low-income neighborhoods do not result in their gentrification;
- Sustainable cities which maintain a balanced and respectful relationship with the surrounding rural area and its natural resources;
- Cities whose economies aim to ensure their inhabitants' well-being, and rely on endogenous and sustainable local economic developments and resources without seeking to attract international investments as a priority above all else;
- Multicultural and welcoming cities which value the presence of its migrants;
- Cities where public spaces are accessible to all and recognized as arenas of social encounter, cultural exchange, political and economic life and, above all, essential places for the freedom of expression;
- Cities where the exercise of cultural rights are the key for social inclusion;

In large metropolises, the Right to the City implies **polycentric agglomeration**, built with the peripheries, with territorial equity and not on a centralistic way. In that way, all the territories of the metropolis, should share weight and visibility.

- Therefore, the range of rights and the variety of ways specified in section 2 "Realizing the rights of all to universal access to quality basic services" could be analyzed in a more holistic way, **mentioning and embracing the concept of the Right to the City**.
- Furthermore, UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights reaffirms the necessary **link between social inclusion, participatory democracy, and human rights** to make inclusive, solidary, fair, democratic and sustainable cities.
- The Committee also stress the fact that, in the current global political crisis, **the Issue Paper should refer more to Local Democracy** and the central role of local governments to strengthen democracy and, consequently, social inclusion. Indeed, local governments aim at bringing power to the base of society, **enabling citizens to participate effectively in the decision-making processes, which affect their daily lives**. Hence the local governments are bound to work on a daily basis, through their public policies and with the participation of their inhabitants, towards "contributing to building inclusive, solidary, livable, fair, democratic, sustainable and enjoyable cities; to launching social organization processes, strengthening social cohesion and building active and responsible citizenship; contributing to build fair, inclusive and solidarity-based urban economies capable of guaranteeing productive inclusion and enhancing popular economic sectors." (Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City).
- In that sense, it is important to mention the relevance of the [Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City](#) adopted by UCLG in 2011. Such document circumscribes the eleven basic civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights,

along with short and mid-term suggested Action Plans in order to implement those rights. **The Charter is a basis for a new local social contract**, renewing the shared commitment of all urban stakeholders together with inhabitants to make democratic, fair, inclusive, solidary and sustainable cities for all the inhabitants, without legal and illegal discrimination. Therefore, **the Committee on Social Inclusion Participatory Democracy and Human Rights believes that the incorporation of the Charter as a guide for further documents and issue papers would be a great addition for discussions in Habitat III.**

- UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights recalls the need for public investments and the **consolidation of local finances** based on progressive local tax system, on consolidated state transfers based on fair criteria of territorial equality and on the creation of Local Development Funds to fulfill the huge demands which growing cities face in terms housing, services and resilient infrastructures.
- We also emphasize the need of the Issue Paper to mention **all the disadvantaged and minority groups, including LGBT, disabled and the elderly** in its recommendations and encourage measures to guarantee their equality and participation.
- The document should also address the **issue of street dwellers people and the criminalization of public spaces occupants**, such as informal workers, who are not mentioned. We note that, even though it is important to mention slum dwellers, they shouldn't be the only focus on the Issue Paper.
- The document should insist more on the **link between environmental justice and social inclusion**, since marginalized communities tend to be more allocated in environmentally harmful areas than wealthier/non-marginalized groups.
- Additionally, the mentioned "range of mechanisms and institutions" necessary to increase social inclusion in cities could be more detailed and specific. For instance, it could be mentioned or developed a **guide listing public policies related to social inclusion**, human rights-based approaches in delivering public services and on independent mechanisms of protection, such as local ombudspersons, complaints procedures, anti-discrimination agencies, civil servant training and information and citizens' awareness-raising, for instance, could be organized in order to help local, regional and national governments that wish to work towards inclusive cities. To that end, it would be convenient to encourage the networks that have been working in that way for years, sharing focuses and experiences on the implementation of the Right to the City.

## References:

[For a world of Inclusive Cities](#), UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, 2013

[Social Inclusion and Participatory Democracy. From conceptual discussion to local action](#), UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, and Governance and Public Policies Institute of Barcelona's Autonomous University, 2014

[Inclusive City Observatory](#), a space for analysis and reflection on local social inclusion policies that contains over sixty case studies on innovative policies for community development, access to basic services, gender equality, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty, among others. The initiative has been developed with the scientific support of Prof. Yves Cabannes from the University College of London (and a team of researchers from the Centre for Social Studies (CES) at the University of Coimbra, which has worked under the supervision of Prof. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, With this Observatory, the Committee aims to identify and investigate successful experiences that might inspire other cities to design and implement their own social inclusion policies

[Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City](#), 2010

[Gwangju's principles for a Human Rights City](#)

[Final Declaration of the 1<sup>st</sup> World Summit of Local Governments for the Right to the City](#). Saint-Denis, Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights of UCLG, 2012.

[Declaration of Mexico](#). International Seminar of Local Governments for the Right to the City, Mexico City, 2015.

[Canoas' Charter for the Right to the City and the Solidary-based Metropolis](#). Forum of the Peripheral Local Authorities FALP, Canoas.

[Les Autorités Locales de périphérie, pour des Villes et métropoles solidaires, durables, démocratiques et citoyennes, Déclaration de Pikine, FALP, 2011](#)

[Solidary, Sustainable and Democratic Metropolises](#). 2<sup>nd</sup> Summit of the Forum of the Peripheral Local Authorities FALP, Getafe, 2010.

[Culture 21 - The Committee on culture of the world association of United Cities and Local Governments \(UCLG\)](#), 2006.