LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS' REPORT TO THE 2023 HLPF

PAPER 3

FOREFRONTING TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION:

How local and regional governments are crafting social and environmental justice and sustainability

Facilitated by:

#SDG11
#HLPF2023
#Listen2Cities

2023 UCLG

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This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of UCLG and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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Special thanks to José Álvarez, Saul Baldeh, Pere Ballester, Jean-Baptiste Buffet, Benedetta Cosco, Adrià Duarte, Gloria Escoruela, Fátima Fernández, Pablo Fernández, Amanda Fléty, Darina Gesheva, Inés Hermoso, Viviana Herrera, Sara Hoeflich, Paloma Labbé, Albert Lladó, Mireia Lozano, Marta Llobet, Kader Makhlouf, Pablo Mariani, Prachi Metawala, Julia Munroe, Firdaous Oussidhoum, Carolina Osorio, Jordi Pascual, Massimo Perrino, Federico Poitier, Agnès Ruiz, Fátima Santiago, Fernando Santomauro, Maria Alejandra Rico, Juan Carlos Uribe, Rosa Vroom, Sarah Vieux and the rest of the UCLG World Secretariat

Special acknowledgment:

Special acknowledgement is given to the authors that have vastly contributed to the five papers: Alexandre Apsan Frediani (IIED) and Camila Cociña (IIED) for their contribution to the drafting of paper 1; Daniel Oviedo (UCL) for his contribution to the drafting of paper 2; Adriana Allen (UCL) and Julia Wesely (UCL) for their contribution to the drafting of paper 3; the UCLG Committee on Culture for their contribution to the drafting of paper 4, as well as Caren Levy for her contribution to the drafting of paper 5. In particular, UCLG would like to express their deepest appreciation to Adriana Allen, Caren Levy and Julia Wesely for the excellent coordination of this initiative on UCL's side and for their knowledge and expertise.

Finally, UCLG would like to thank all the GTF networks, LRGs, LGAs and partners who responded to the GTF/UCLG 2023 Survey, those who participated in the consultations on the review of SDG 11, those who held online interviews with UCLG in April 2023 and those who submitted additional information about the state of localization in their territories.

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1. Background. Localizing SDG 11 to empower communities for sustainable transformation

The current context of multiple and intersecting local-global crises makes accelerating progress towards the urban Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) – SDG 11 – an even more difficult, yet necessary agenda. Most notably, these crises include the climate emergency, the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global cost of living and multiple armed conflicts, all of which contribute to deepening inequalities. Nevertheless, the past few years have also seen a re-energized global municipalist movement with ambitious commitments, alternative visions and bold strategies to spearhead efforts for more just and equal cities and territories.

In an increasingly urbanizing world, local and regional governments (LRGs) – with different degrees of autonomy and decentralized resources and responsibilities – are the bedrock of achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 11. LRGs play a pivotal role based on their deep understanding of challenges for SDG localization. They provide access to adequate housing and basic services; ground their planning strategies in feminism, accessibility and participation; reduce disaster risk; and protect natural and cultural heritage. Moreover, they serve as key nodes and drivers for advancing a rights-based approach, as well as building and strengthening multistakeholder and multilevel partnerships. The latter involves forming coalitions of actors across levels of government, civil society, local communities, the private sector and international organizations, aiming to leverage resources and capacities towards "Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable."

Table 1 List of cities, regions, LGAs, GTF networks and partners contributing to the papers

Paper	Contributors
Paper 1. Housing and basic services from below: How LRGs are advancing the right to adequate housing Drafted by Camila Cociña, Researcher, and Alexandre Apsan Frediani, Principal Researcher, at the International Institute for Environment and Development	**LRGs:** Afadzato South District (Ghana), Barcelona (Spain), Bilbao (Spain), Esteban Echeverría (Argentina), Iztapalapa (Mexico), Montevideo (Uruguay), Montréal (Canada), Municipio B (Uruguay) **GTF networks:** Euro-Latin American Cities Cooperation Alliance (AL-LAs), Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), Mercociudades, UCLG, UCLG Africa **Partners:** Habitat International Coalition, World Blind Union
Paper 2. Integrated and participatory urban planning: How LRGs enable equality through feminism, accessibility and proximity Drafted by Daniel Oviedo, Associate Professor at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL, with support from Julia Wesley, María José Arbeláez and Caren Levy, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL	**LRGs and LGAs:** Federation of Municipalities of the Dominican Republic (Dominican Republic), Lisbon (Portugal), New York (USA), Quilmes (Argentina), Santa Fe (Argentina), Villa Carlos Paz (Argentina), VNG International (the Netherlands) **GTF networks:** C40, CEMR, Metropolis, UCLG, UCLG Africa **Partners:** Entrepreneurship Territory Innovation (ETI) Chair at the Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, General Assembly of Partners – Older Persons, Global Disability Innovation Hub, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing, World Blind Union, World Enabled
Paper 3. Forefronting transformative action: How local and regional governments are crafting social and environmental justice and sustainability Drafted by Adriana Allen, Professor of Development Planning and Urban Sustainability, and Julia Wesely, Researcher, at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL	**LRGs and LGAs:** Afadzato South District (Ghana), Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI), Azambuja (Portugal), Bandar Lampung (Indonesia), Barcelona (Spain), Basse Area Council (the Gambia), Barcarena (Brazil), Bogotá (Colombia), Canelones (Uruguay), Commune Haho 1 (Togo), Esteban Echeverría (Argentina), Góis (Portugal), Granollers (Spain), Johannesburg (South Africa), Nancy (France), Peñalolén (Chile), Pombal (Portugal), Rosario (Argentina), Rotterdam (the Netherlands), Terrassa (Spain), Villa María (Argentina), Viña del Mar (Chile) **GTF networks:** CEMR, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Local Governments Associations (FLACMA), UCLG, UCLG Africa **Partners:** World Blind Union
Paper 4. A cultural boost in the achievement of the SDGs: How LRGs are promoting cultural heritage and sustainable cities and territories Drafted by Marta Llobet, Agnès Ruiz, Sarah Vieux and Jordi Pascual, Secretariat of the UCLG Committee on Culture	**LRGs:** Barcelona (Spain), Bogotá (Colombia), Buenos Aires (Argentina), California (USA), Dublin (Ireland), Durban (South Africa), Lisbon (Portugal), Malmö (Sweden), Mexico City (Mexico), Montevideo (Uruguay), Montréal (Canada), Morelia (Mexico), Pombal (Portugal), Saint-Louis (Senegal), San Antonio (USA), Taipei, València (Spain), Xi'an (People's Republic of China) **GTF networks:** Global Parliament of Mayors, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, Resilient Cities Network, UCLG, Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities (UCCI) **Partners:** World Blind Union, Serhan Ada, Sylvia Amann, Enrique Avogadro, Jordi Baltà, John Crowley, Beatriz García, Enrique Glockner, Antoine Guibert, Lucina Jiménez, Tita Larasati, Alfons Martinell, Marie-Odile Melançon, Justin O'Connor, Jose Oliveira Junior, Jainité Rueda, John Smithies, Magdalena Suárez, Alison Tickell
Paper 5. Multilevel governance and finance: How LRGs advocate for balanced urban systems Drafted by Caren Levy, Professor of Transformative Urban Planning at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL	**LRGs:** Basque Country (Spain) **GTF networks:** Metropolis, UCLG **Partners:** World Blind Union

Source: own compilation

This paper, together with the other four papers included in the 7th *Towards the localization of the SDGs* report, produced by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF) in 2023, builds on extensive desk research. In particular, they draw on experiences and policies reported by cities, regions, local government associations (LGAs), GTF networks and partners via the GTF/United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) 2023 survey, several written consultation processes and interviews (see Table 1).

The five papers provide a complementary and integrated vision of the pathways LRGs are taking to achieve SDG 11 and closely related SDGs. In other words, they highlight trajectories for change, illustrated through innovative case studies, in which LRGs take an active role and forward-looking approach to promote more equitable and sustainable futures. LRGs do so through strategic decisions and concerted practices in collaboration with different urban stakeholders.* The papers further outline enabling environments for those pathways as well as persistent challenges and deep inequalities that slow down and, in some cases, halt progress towards achieving SDG 11 and the full 2030 Agenda.

Each paper delves into a specific topic related to the localization of SDG 11:

Paper 1 shows how LRGs, five years after the Municipalist Declaration of Local Governments for the Right to Housing and the Right to the City, are using a range of housing actions to recognize, protect and fulfil the right to adequate housing and basic services. These actions accelerate progress towards **SDG target 11.1**.

Paper 2 builds upon feminist approaches to the design and implementation of planning policies, as an entry point to foster accessibility, proximity and participation – crucial conditions for sustainable and inclusive communities – thereby working towards **SDG targets 11.2, 11.3 and 11.7**.

Paper 3 focuses on LRGs' role in pursuing environmental justice and integrated and circular approaches that address the overlapping crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and ecological overshoot, reflecting **SDG targets 11.5, 11.6, 11.7 and 11.b**.

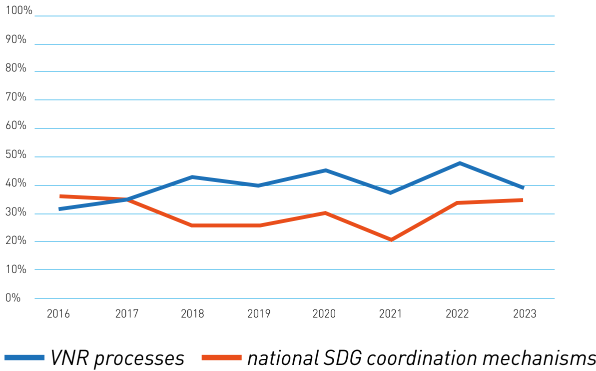
Paper 4 argues that while culture and heritage are hardly visible across the SDGs (and, indeed, should be addressed explicitly through a proposed SDG 18), they are fundamental dimensions of localizing sustainability agendas. This paper speaks particularly to achieving **SDG target 11.4**.

Paper 5 outlines how, to achieve more balanced and equal urban and territorial systems, multilevel governance at all levels should be strengthened, based on the principle of subsidiarity and enhanced coherence of territorial and sectoral policies. National governments can open space for LRGs to work towards **SDG target 11.a** through genuine fiscal, administrative and political decentralization.

The next two pages present the highlights of the *Towards the localization of the SDGs* report, including the cities', regions' and associations' best practices mentioned in the five papers as well as the contribution of LRGs to the SDG 11 targets and the rest of the SDGs, as analyzed by the five papers.

Highlights

% of countries with LRGs' high and medium participation in VNR processes and in the national SDG coordination mechanisms



Since 2018, LRGs and their associations have produced over 240 VLRs and 37 VSRs

representing

1.4 bn people

170,000 LRGs

Cities', regions' and associations' best practices mentioned in the five papers

● PAPER 1 ● PAPER 2 ● PAPER 3 ● PAPER 4 ● PAPER 5

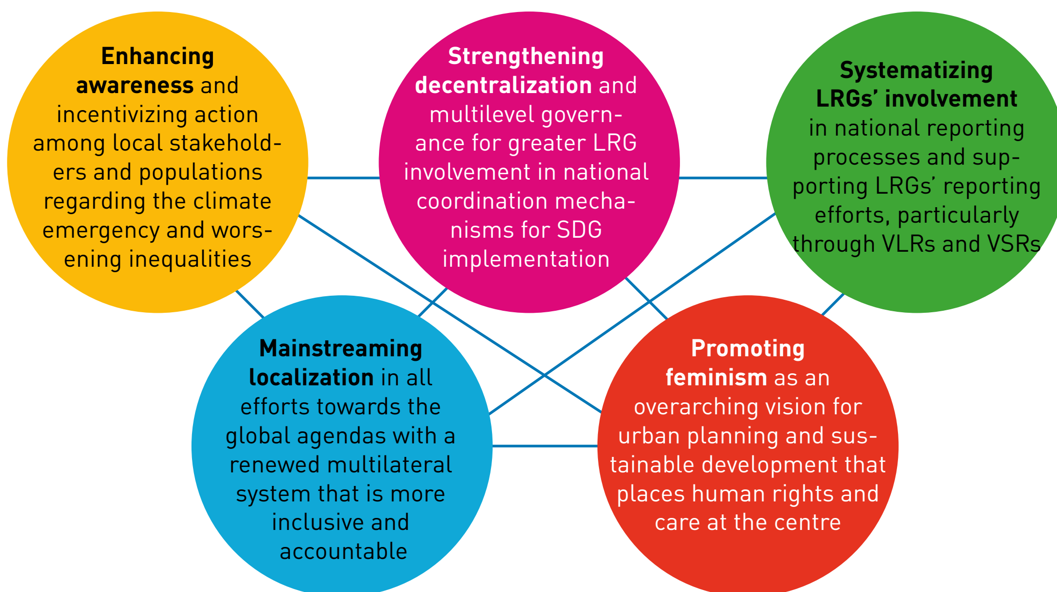
Montreal
New York
Dominican Federation of Municipalities
San Antonio
Vancouver
Portland
San Francisco
California
Morelia
Mexico City
Iztapalapa
Bogotá
Medellín
Quito
Villa Carlos Paz
Peñalolén
Renca
Recoleta
Viña del Mar
Concepción
Valdivia
Santa Fe
Quilmes
Buenos Aires
Esteban Echeverría
Montevideo
Canelones
São Paulo
Rio de Janeiro
Barcarena
Izmir
Kadiköy
Chiyah
Sfax
Dalifort-Foirail
Yoff
Saint-Louis
Basse Area
Freetown
Makeni
Afadzato South District
Yaoundé
Kigali
Lilongwe
Entebbe
Nairobi
Dar-es-Salaam
Pemba
Harare
Bulawayo
Durban
Johannesburg
Gobabis
Abu Dhabi
Pokhara
Lekhnath
Xi'an
Delhi
Varanasi
Odisha State
State of Tamil Nadu
Seoul
Kyoto
Taipei City
Nakhon Sawan
Penang State
Turku
Oulu
Tampere
Helsinki
Estonia municipalities
Malmö
Amsterdam + VNG International
Rotterdam
London
Liverpool
Dublin
Bilbao
Basque Country
Soria
Burgos
Brussels
Paris
Nancy
Ghent
Berlin
Vienna
Munich
Pombal
Mafra
Lisbon
Granollers
Barcelona
Navarra
València
Andalusian Municipality Fund for International Solidarity
Puerto de la Cruz
Federation of Local Authorities in Northern Morocco and Andalusia

Contribution of LRGs to the SDG 11 targets and related SDGs, as analyzed by the five papers

Paper		Targets
PAPER 1 **Housing and basic services from below:** How local and regional governments are advancing the right to adequate housing	SDG 11	11.1
PAPER 2 **Integrated and participatory urban planning:** How local and regional governments enable equality through feminism, accessibility and proximity	SDG 11	11.2, 11.3, 11.7
PAPER 3 **Forefronting transformative action:** How local and regional governments are crafting social and environmental justice and sustainability	SDG 11	11.5, 11.6, 11.7, 11.b
PAPER 4 **A cultural boost in the achievement of the SDGs:** How local and regional governments are promoting cultural heritage and sustainable cities and territories	SDG 11	11.4
PAPER 5 **Multilevel governance and finance:** How local and regional governments advocate for balanced urban systems	SDG 11	11.a

1 NO POVERTY
2 ZERO HUNGER
3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
4 QUALITY EDUCATION
5 GENDER EQUALITY
6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION
7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY
8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
13 CLIMATE ACTION
14 LIFE BELOW WATER
15 LIFE ON LAND
16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Ways forward for SDG localization



2. Accelerating action towards socially and environmentally just cities and territories

The global municipalist movement is at a pivotal moment for accelerating progress towards planetary goals while addressing intersecting systemic crises, including climate change and biodiversity loss. Local and regional governments (LRGs) are key actors in a wider process of societal transformation due to their role as stewards of socio-environmental justice across urban, peri-urban and rural territories. They also play a key role in the implementation of policies and interventions based on a deep understanding of the **interdependency between human and non-human rights**.

Recent reports confirm that progress towards achieving the aims outlined in global conventions for sustainability, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere programme, and the Convention on Biological Diversity, and in those on human rights, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is too slow, unevenly distributed or even regressing. For example, although global CO_2 emissions fell by 5.2% in 2020 due to lower energy demands during the COVID-19 crisis, they have bounced back to their highest level ever, increasing 6% in 2021.[1] The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC's) Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) clearly states that human-induced climate change is already causing adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people across all regions, while disproportionately affecting those who contribute the least to the current climate crisis. Furthermore, the report corroborates the limits of current commitments and actions to tackle localized loss and damage. It argues that the greatest gains in wellbeing in urban areas and wider territories can be achieved if localized finance to reduce climate risk prioritizes low-income and informal communities.[2]

Calls to confront social and spatial inequalities in human-nature relations resonate with this paper's core position: **socially and environmentally just cities and territories can be defined as those in which all human residents and non-human species in their interdependence have an equal opportunity to thrive**. This implies that health outcomes and environmental benefits are shared equitably, regardless of class, gender, race, ethnicity, origin, age, sexual orientation, religion and disability, while also considering the intersection of different forms of discrimination based on these identities and experiences. LRGs, together with civil society organizations (CSOs) and everyday city-makers whose practices are often dismissed as informal, have a key role in crafting just cities and territories.

This paper builds on the Renaturing pathway of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) GOLD VI report.[3] It also builds on the adoption of a rights-based approach to "just re-naturing," that is, tackling processes of maldistribution and misrecognition in cities and territories while, at the same time, seeking to achieve greater inclusion and parity-oriented political participation in decision-making. In doing so, the paper examines trends and LRGs' experiences in realizing **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 targets** related to environmentally sustainable and socially just urban and territorial development. Specifically, it analyzes LRGs' capacities and interventions addressing the climate emergency (**target 11.b**), protecting people in vulnerable situations against disaster risk (**target 11.5**), reducing negative environmental impacts of cities (**target 11.6**) and providing access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces (**target 11.7**).[4]

Section 2 outlines four global trends increasingly compromising the realization of just and sustainable cities and territories (see Figure 1). Addressing these trends, Section 3 proposes four corresponding pathways for LRGs to spearhead innovative and bold actions. Section 4 identifies key capacities LRGs are building as well as the common challenges they are facing in embarking on the identified pathways. Section 5 synthesizes key messages to advance LRGs' role in accelerating progress towards just and sustainable cities and territories.

Figure 1 Trends, SDG targets and pathways

Trends and SDG targets	Pathways
Urbanization, extractivism and ecological overshoot (11.6)	Decoupling urban development from extractivist approaches
Demographic trends and their infrastructure implications (11.6)	Planning infrastructure with nature for current and future cities and territories
The climate change emergency, loss and damage and slow-onset risk (11.b, 11.5)	Localizing climate justice across mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage mechanisms
The unequal impacts of privatizing common environmental assets (11.7)	Commoning environmental assets and services

Source: own compilation

3. Trends

Urbanization, extractivism and ecological overshoot

About 75% of global natural resources are currently consumed in cities.[5] Pressure on land, water, energy, rare and forest materials and other resources in the commons is expected to further increase under highly unequal conditions. Over the past 100 years, global material consumption has grown eightfold and is projected to triple again by 2050.[6] Under a business-as-usual scenario, the annual resource requirements of the world's urban settlements will increase from 40 billion tonnes in 2010 to 90 billion tonnes by 2050. Furthermore, the negative impacts and resulting scarcities of this material footprint will continue to be highly unequally distributed. Domestic material consumption, for example, has seen a 65% increase between 2000 and 2019, totalling 95.1 billion metric tonnes, 70% of which come from East and South-East Asia, Europe and North America.[7] In terms of per capita footprint, most of Africa as well as India account for 1–5 tonnes, while North America, Europe and Australia use 20–50 tonnes.[8]

Resource scarcities are increasingly driven by the financialization of nature and life-support systems and widespread extractivism. Cities and territories in the Global South are the primary targets of global extractive practices by corporate private interests. Thus, while consumption trends are largely similar across regions, the capacity of LRGs in the Global South to control these practices is severely limited, leading to heightened environmental depletion and degradation. This reality – and the underlying debates on who gets to grow their economy, how, and with what benefits and costs to whom – requires critical and people-centred perspectives on green growth, de-growth and post-growth transitions to ensure a sustainable and good quality of life for all. It also requires a critical assessment of the transactional inequalities embedded in mechanisms to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation,[9] carbon and biodiversity offsetting and habitat banks, among others. All these mechanisms put a price on nature, turning it into a financial asset. Yet, if embedded in more equal power relations and negotiations mediated by LRGs, they could, for example, potentially enable local Indigenous communities to maintain their way of life.

To reduce material consumption in alignment with net zero 2050 targets, urban settlements would have to cut their consumption by at least 50%.[10] This requires **addressing *resource inefficiencies* which contribute significantly to this ecological overshoot**. For example, globally, about 14% of food produced is lost between harvest and retail, with higher losses in Sub-Saharan Africa.[11] Additionally, an estimated 17% of food (equivalent to 121 kg per person per year) is wasted by consumers, retailers and producers, with particularly high numbers in the Global North. This reality points to the responsibility of big food corporations and the impact of conventional globalized food systems, which are currently responsible for around 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions. They are also major drivers of land degradation, biodiversity loss and water, air and soil pollution. Food loss and food waste impact not only the right to food in cities and regions, but food in landfills also generates an estimated 8–10% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Increasing resource efficiency, consequently, would reduce extractive and unfair relationships between urban systems and nature and contribute to the mitigation of their negative impacts as well as contributing to more sustainable and inclusive urban food systems.

Moreover, **reverting ecological overshoot requires significant steps towards *resource sufficiency*, challenging current patterns of resource ownership and embedded inequalities**. Resource scarcities and abundances are intimately tied to long-term structural and intersecting inequalities, making visible how racism and patriarchal relationships, ageism and ableism, colonialism and the commodification of land and nature continue to shape social-spatial divisions. More equal access requires structural change including the redistribution of global resource consumption, for instance, lowering consumption to 6–10 tonnes per capita for wealthy dwellers and increasing it to 5–8 tonnes for poor dwellers.[12]

Considering that 80% of the global energy supply is consumed in cities, the energy sector has emerged in recent years as a key opportunity for LRGs to simultaneously address efficiency as well as sufficiency.[13] As fossil fuel energy sources are becoming increasingly unaffordable, renewable energy supply attracted over 300 billion USD in investment in 2020, twice the combined investments in fossil fuel and nuclear power in that year.[14] The initiative for Energy Compacts recognized the underutilized role of LRGs in the energy transition and leveraged commitments from the private sector and NGOs, as well as LRGs and national governments, for more integrated energy systems. Launched in 2021, its signatories invested 46 billion USD to this end, improving access to clean cooking for 14 million people and enhancing electricity access for 6 million people.[15]

Demographic trends and their infrastructure implications

Globally, over the past 30 years, cities have physically expanded much faster than actual population growth, averaging an annual land consumption rate of 1.7% between 2010 and 2020 vis-à-vis a population growth rate of 0.6%. However, there are significant regional differences in land consumption, with the highest levels recorded in East and South-East Asia as well as Sub-Saharan Africa. In terms of population growth rates, East and South-East Asia have seen drastic declines while Sub-Saharan Africa recorded the highest level. Although the drivers of growth are diverse, particular attention should be paid to the 89.3 million forcibly displaced people (as of the end of 2021) worldwide, many of whom moved to cities to seek opportunities but are forced to live in poor housing without basic infrastructure and services.[16] In addition to population growth, it is essential to consider further demographic characteristics for planning more sustainable and just cities. For example, 25% of today's global population are persons with disabilities and older persons. Current estimates expect there to be about two billion older adults and people with disabilities by 2050, making it paramount to re-think how building "cities for all" can dismantle current barriers, including access to the commons and public services and infrastructure.[17]

In the Global South, it is estimated that material infrastructure for an additional 3.4 billion new urban dwellers will need to be produced by 2050, equivalent to almost 50% of the existing urban fabric.[18] This estimate stems from reducing infrastructure deficits such as those visible in the sanitation sector (e.g. across Sub-Saharan Africa, only 22% of inhabitants have access to safe sanitation)[19] as well as projected growth in small, intermediary and large urban centres. The projected de-densification of urban settlements would increase urban land use from 1 million km^2 to 2.5 million km^2 by 2050, with a large share of this expansion happening on productive farmland, notably in Asia and Africa, with devastating consequences on food supply and food sovereignty.[20]

Modern planning principles have, in many countries, promoted a separation of activities and land uses, shaping how LRGs approach the infrastructure requirements of urban centres, industrial sites, peripheries and their connectors.[21] The socio-spatial dynamics of mixed land uses and coherence across different planning approaches are discussed in Paper 2, while this paper focuses on environmental drivers and impacts of current and future grey, green and blue infrastructure developments. For example, the cement industry is annually responsible for 11% (2,200 tonnes) of global anthropogenic mercury emissions. The expected acceleration of construction works and local cement supplies, particularly in Asia and Africa, will further increment emissions, impacting humans and ecosystems.[22]

Nature-based solutions, in combination with strategies to restore the social and environmental function of the commons (see the pathway on "commoning environmental assets and services"), have been promoted in many cities as enabling environmentally friendly, multifunctional urban spaces, recovering ecosystems while providing health and economic benefits. However, in highly constrained spaces and dense areas, ecological restoration through blue and green infrastructure often comes at the expense of socio-economic losses.[23] There is no simple answer to what form urban growth should take to achieve the SDGs – for example, how much to densify and when sprawl should be allowed.[24] Although not a panacea, the general tendency is to promote policies of densification and agglomeration to reduce infrastructure costs and related resource use and to foster social benefits through enhanced accessibility to basic services and neighbourhoods with social proximity.

The climate change emergency, loss and damage and slow-onset risk

Climate change contributes to severe adverse impacts on urban areas, including hot extremes, negative impacts of disasters on basic infrastructure and service disruptions that affect particularly marginalized urban dwellers. Vulnerability is concentrated specifically in informal and rapidly growing smaller settlements and on the lands of Indigenous peoples, whose lives and livelihoods depend directly on the functioning of ecosystems.

There are many formal and informal initiatives pursuing a long-term vision and actions towards low-emission societies. These initiatives craft urban and territorial resilience through concerted action on adaptation and mitigation, while tackling loss and damage. By the end of March 2023, 2,323 jurisdictions and local governments in 40 countries have declared a climate emergency, covering one billion citizens.[25] The Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy brings together over 12,700 LRGs representing over 1.1 billion people – equivalent to one out of every eight people living in a city. Moreover, the number of countries with local disaster risk reduction strategies almost doubled between 2015 and 2021, from 51 to 98 countries.[26] These initiatives postulate tackling climate change as a human rights challenge and consider its severe repercussions, for example, on the right to adequate housing and on marginalized groups such as people with disabilities. They further foreground inequalities between inhabitants, cities and regions in the way these human rights violations are experienced, while acknowledging that local disaster risk reduction plans often lack in data disaggregation, implementation and monitoring.[27]

While the scale and scope of the climate crisis have long been known, the past years have demonstrated this crisis's profound intersections with other crises, such as pandemics, conflicts and the cost-of-living crisis.[28] For example, dramatic price increases by 65% in natural gas, 21% in oil and 126% in coal over the course of 2022 are inextricably linked to the war in Ukraine and its impacts on European natural gas markets; disasters like the heatwave and subsequent floods in Pakistan disrupted energy supplies and damaged power stations.[29] These compound global-local crises demand LRG responses in terms of mitigation – reducing emissions as well as dependency on non-renewable resources; adaptation – actions to improve liveability while facing impacts of climate change on diverse environments; as well as loss and damage – transferring and allocating reparation funding for ir-

reversible negative impacts, particularly to low-income populations who are most severely affected yet contribute least to the crisis. The latter has been a milestone achievement promoted by LRGs at COP27 in Egypt.

The past years have also seen the unprecedented commitment of governments and the private sector to mitigation, especially to decrease the volatility of energy markets by investing at a higher and faster rate in renewables compared to fossil fuels, and to localizing energy generation. Nonetheless, the IPCC AR6 synthesis report emphasizes that **global efforts, particularly those from the Global North and emerging markets, are far from realizing the Paris Agreement commitment to limit global warming to 1.5°C**.[30] Moreover, the report critiques that many mitigation and adaptation actions have been fragmented, sectorial and unevenly distributed across regions. The core message is that of a narrowing window for governments, the private sector and civil society to act and secure liveable and sustainable futures.

The unequal impacts of privatized common environmental assets

The fourth trend concerns inequalities in access to and control over environmental benefits such as green spaces and healthy food inside and outside of cities. **These inequalities are deepened by the privatization and commodification of land and environmental assets and services by urban elites**, including property developers, financial institutions, owners and operators. They **manifest in green gentrification, further excluding and displacing those who have historically suffered disproportionately from environmental burdens and green space deficits**.

As LRGs are revitalizing downtowns, re-developing post-industrial sites and planning for more climate-resilient cities, they are challenged to find modes of urban governance that are more socially inclusive as well as ecologically sustainable. The notion of "life systems" has hereby been useful, as it emphasizes care and healthy living, through more inclusive and accessible basic services (e.g. food, health, housing) and sustainable working patterns. Paper 4 examines how these ambitions are linked to culturally sensitive and appropriate modes of planning.

A survey of 962 cities in 2020 showed that only 37.8% of residential neighbourhoods and 45.2% of their population were located within 400 metres walking distance to public green spaces. This issue has been picked up by LRGs and urban planners, particularly in the context of post-pandemic planning and in light of the pandemic's impact on physical and mental health (see Paper 2 on accessibility, proximity and the concept of the 15-minute city).[31] For example, the importance of proximity has been recognized by UCLG's Intermediary Cities forum.[32] However, challenges such as the need for disaggregated data remain, in particular to capture the impact of the new measures on the inclusion of people with disabilities, among other groups.

Privatization has long been advocated as a solution to the management of scarce common-pool resources based on arguments for increased efficiency and control over resources. Yet, in practice, critical questions have been raised regarding externalized negative environmental impacts and operative risks, as well as monopolistic pricing and reduced service provision against surplus value increase. Privatization encapsulates a variety of forms through which the governance, use and distribution of resources are transferred to private entities – including the privatization of governance processes and physical resources, as well as intellectual property.[33] An example of the latter is the case of patenting seeds. Held in the public domain, crop varieties gave farmers the possibility of adapting their production systems and livelihoods to local conditions. Genetically modified crop varieties, in contrast, were promoted by the private sector as superior to traditional seeds, increasing farmers' dependency on private seeds as well as the machinery, fertilizers and pesticides they require. This massively eradicated biodiversity through mono-cropping and contributed to the loss of traditional agricultural knowledges.

In response to different forms of privatization, there is an increasing re-municipalization of outsourced assets and services, often supported by labour unions and CSOs. Furthermore, **LRGs are spearheading the development of new forms of urban governance that see democratization processes and principles of justice, sustainability and proximity at the core of public service provision**. An example is the alignment of public procurement with more sustainable, proximity-based and inclusive practices.[34] Although re-municipalization has been predominant in Europe, it has extended to a documented 1,600 cities in 45 countries.[35]

4. Unpacking the pathways: Decoupling, restoring, localizing and commoning

In conjunction with long-term challenges, cities and territories have recently faced significant external shocks, crises and complex emergencies. These include the COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, energy crisis, cost-of-living crisis, decline of democratic practices, the climate emergency and the African food crisis. LRGs have focused on how to tackle the unfolding multilevel crises and complex emergencies, seeking recovery and transformative transitions. The uncertain times in which we live call for constant reassessment of how people, work and human activity are taking place in and across urban regions, as well as for renewed efforts to steer the urban regions' social and environmental functions now and into the future. These efforts are examined below across four interconnected pathways.

Decoupling urban development from extractivist approaches

The first pathway examines the actions required to tackle current and projected resource scarcities. While LRGs are not yet fully engaging with ways of fighting the multiple expressions and material impacts of extractivism,

incipient initiatives to decouple urban development from intense resource use have arisen that promote systems within cities and their wider hinterlands.[36]

Beyond the risks of prevailing business-oriented approaches to the creation of circular cities,[37] the sidelining of social factors and the emphasis on the optimization of physical resource flows instead of environmental preservation,[38] many cities are engaging in substantial efforts to adopt a more transformative approach to the circular economy. This includes the experience of **Johannesburg** (South Africa), where a circular economy plan proposes increased investment in green manufacturing and job creation, renewable energy, energy efficiency initiatives, next generation mobility, alternative waste management and sustainable agriculture and food security. The initiatives are framed under Johannesburg's Integrated Development Plan, titled "The People's Plan," which aims to deepen the local authority's effective intervention in the city's political economy of space and services, while broadening participation in the local economy by removing barriers across class, race, gender and ability, particularly for the urban poor.[39]

Another example is **São Paulo**'s (Brazil) Connect the Dots programme to create a food system network that tackles social inequalities and supports regenerative farming in the peri-urban zone and surrounding metropolitan area.[40] The programme provides technical assistance, training and equipment to local farmers through Houses of Ecological Farming, supported by a digital platform for managing technical assistance. Through these means, the municipality promotes the conversion from conventional to organic farming and supports and purchases produce from local farmers to provide healthy food for structurally discriminated people.

A common feature among these pioneering experiences is their **reimagination of how resource flows moving through urban and territorial economies can be "closed," whether through regenerating, sharing, optimizing, looping, virtualizing or exchanging, or using a combination of these approaches.**[41] **Amsterdam** (the Netherlands) clearly demonstrates this multidimensional approach (see Box 1).

BOX 1

Amsterdam's approach to circularity

Amsterdam's experience in building a circular city relies on experimentation with multiple initiatives. These include the introduction of legislative "free zones" and a "Manifesto for a Circular Buiksloterham" implemented in a decaying post-industrial area, which enable partners to trial circular and bio-based approaches to waste collection and water and sanitation management. In 2016, Amsterdam adopted a Fab City label to explore geographically distributed urban production systems through the adoption of new technologies to support more efficient mobility and food systems. The city also harbours a fully circular and self-sufficient community called "De Ceuvel" that pioneers a participatory approach to circular living. There, residents construct self-built homes from recycled materials and manage the community's material, energy and food flows.

Creating networked capacities to support circular cities is another approach widely adopted by LRGs. For example, the **Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity** (FAMSI) and the **Federation of Local Authorities in Northern Morocco and Andalusia**, in collaboration with the **Andalusian Association of Renewable Energies** (Spain), have spearheaded a circular mobility scheme among young professionals in the green economy and renewable energy sector. The scheme promotes the co-development of entrepreneurship and networks for innovation and employment, thus contributing to retaining talent in the country of origin and generating employment and active entrepreneurship opportunities among young Moroccans.[42] Similarly, in partnership with the French Agency for Ecological Transition, the **UCLG Africa Academy** is preparing a Training of Trainers programme on circular economy, adapting and contextualizing the pedagogical content to the specific African local context, hence promoting African expertise and sharing of resources and tools.

In many cases, LRGs reinforce environmental systems and standards adopted long ago but place a renewed emphasis on more circular approaches that go beyond command and control. In the case of **Canelones** (Uruguay), such an approach saw the implementation of a monitoring unit for industrial effluents that controls the installation of industries and businesses. The unit takes actions that minimize water, air and soil contamination, taking special care of the final disposal of effluents as a key step in community disease control.

The circular economy approach makes use of LRGs' knowledge of their territories, self-governance and autonomy in urban planning with regard to waste, water and public transport, among other areas.[43] In many city strategies, municipalities position themselves as facilitators and see investments to replace unsustainable infrastructure systems as too high to be tackled alone, therefore relying on public-private partnerships and business investors. Thus, radical aspirations are often curtailed and shaped in practice by either limited avail-

able resources or LRGs' capacity to attract and control private investments.

The circular cities movement encompasses approaches that seek accommodation strategies via green growth – therefore keeping extractivist trends unchallenged – and more radical approaches that look into how diversifying and de-growing urban regions' economies can enable radical transformations in a resource-scarce world.[44] The latter emphasize the role of grassroots communities and citizens in the co-creation and co-governance of pathways towards more equal and sustainable societies, involving community-driven energy programmes and maker, repair and reuse networks, among others. **Radical approaches to the circular economy still need to take root in the most vulnerable cities and territories, which are often highly dependent on natural resources extractivism.** Under these conditions, the challenge is how to advance alternative systems that allow LRGs to gain autonomy in the face of entrenched trends of resource exploitation and mass dispossession.

Planning infrastructure with nature for current and future cities and territories

This pathway sheds light on how **fulfilling historical, current and future infrastructure needs requires a paradigm shift towards revitalizing and restoring urban ecological infrastructure through inclusive citizen engagement**. Urban infrastructures are interrelated socio-technical systems that provide energy, water, waste, mobility and communication services. While regulating resource flows and emissions, they can enable or restrain access to critical services and socio-spatial inclusion, they can be sources of resilience or vulnerability to hazards and technical disruptions, and they can support resource-intensive linear management flows or circular ones. As such, urban infrastructures play an essential role in enabling, sustaining and enhancing urban living conditions and vital systems. The way in which they are conceived, planned, managed and governed can thus open or close different pathways towards more equitable and sustainable urban futures. Investing in the ecological restoration and rehabilitation of ecosystems such as rivers, lakes and woodlands is not only ecologically and socially desirable, but also economically advantageous.[45]

Infrastructure transformations are at the heart of structuring sustainable long-term urban processes. Therefore, they require LRGs to consider political rather than just technical questions, matters of statehood, corporate interests and the common good, path dependency and vested interests, land use patterns and social practices, and biases in finance and investments among the hegemonic ways in which infrastructure decisions and transitions are negotiated. Therefore, a key consideration is that **infrastructure change often occurs through dynamic, incremental and relational processes** through which ordinary citizens build, maintain and manage urban infrastructures and services.

Across the Global South, urban infrastructures are typically broken, incomplete, poorly regulated, underfunded and often reliant on vernacular and incremental approaches and improvisations that are still systematically dismissed as inadequate and inefficient from the viewpoint of Western infrastructure models. Take, for instance, the sanitation grid versus off-grid debate across Asian and Sub-Saharan African cities, where most of the population relies on on-site sanitation facilities.[46] These systems typically generate faecal sludge, yet faecal sludge management still constitutes an underfunded and overlooked stage within the sanitation service chain. An integrated approach to faecal sludge management is critical to secure the health and environmental protection of large sectors of urban dwellers, as exemplified in an ambitious programme by the **Tamil Nadu State** in India (see Box 2).

BOX 2

Advancing just sanitation through faecal sludge management

The **Tamil Nadu** Urban Sanitation Support Programme[47] in India tackles sanitation problems head on. Since 2016, the programme has focused on scaling inclusive faecal sludge management across all the urban local bodies in Tamil Nadu. The programme is led by the state government with the support of the Indian Institute for Human Settlements to advance total and inclusive urban sanitation across the state. Its approach to urban sanitation requires a full consideration of the workers that manage sanitation flows across the service chain and those engaged in emptying and transport services. The programme further highlights the often-invisible role of women as sanitation providers, not just users.[48] Thinking about urban infrastructures as living and hybrid systems based on a broad spectrum of knowledge, social innovations and relational practices, is essential to produce more inclusive infrastructure systems.

The principle behind many ongoing interventions by LRGs is to focus infrastructure investments where historical deficits and contemporary needs are higher. For example, over the last 10 years, the local government of the municipality of **Esteban Echeverría** (Argentina) has strongly invested in the construction of basic infrastructure networks. As a result, it increased water and sewerage coverage from less than 25% to more than 80% of the population. In the Gambia, the **Basse Area** Council has developed a strategic plan to reconstruct the town's drainage system and the Gujuguju Bolong canal to mitigate flood risk. This canal is the main waterway for sustaining effective drainage around and within the city. The council's initiatives include urban mapping to guide the approval of settlements and housing development in the Upper River Region.[49]

Working with nature is an old urban design concept. However, it is only in recent years that acknowledging and revitalizing the ecological infrastructure of a city has become popular among LRGs, as demonstrated by the experience of **Granollers** (Spain) in Box 3.

BOX 3

The recovery of the Congost River in Granollers

Since the 1990s, the city of **Granollers** in the metropolitan area of Barcelona (Spain) has been tackling the legacy of poorly planned past interventions that led to the degradation of the city's river basins and Mediterranean forests. The city's actions have involved the social and natural recovery of the Congost River, the restoration of the abandoned site Can Cabanyes into a wetland for biodiversity, water reclamation and public use, and a city-wide system of water reuse. The strategies adopted included increasing the river's natural hydromorphology to promote new microhabitats and biodiversity and improving the river's longitudinal ecological connectivity by removing concrete blocks across the riverbed.

Under the auspices of the International Cooperation to Restore and Connect Urban Environments in Latin America and Europe (INTERLACE) Programme, the city is now exploring methodologies for measuring the impact of implemented nature-based solutions, using more inclusive and ecologically coherent planning and governance mechanisms, and sharing its experience with other intermediary cities in Europe and Latin America.[50]

Straddling this and the following pathway is the need to advance a just transition to clean energy and affordable energy (SDG 7), a key priority for many cities across the world. Across the urban Global South, the energy mix is dominated by coal-fired power, which negatively and especially affects women in informal settlements due to their disproportionate role in caretaking activities such as cooking. Among other cities, **Johannesburg** (South Africa) is transitioning to a cleaner energy mix that includes natural gas and renewable sources such as solar and wind power. To realize its commitment to the Paris Agreement, the city aims to source 25% of its electricity from renewable energy by 2030, while entering into long-term purchase agreements with independent power producers and installing small-scale embedded generation facilities to supplement the energy supply.

Localizing climate justice across mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage mechanisms

This pathway explores LRG actions to advance climate justice, with specific consideration of policies and practices to tackle mitigation and adaptation challenges and to localize loss and damage financial mechanisms. As the climate emergency demands the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, cultural policies become central to LRGs' responses. Their responses address intangible and tangible cultural heritage, creativity, Indigenous peoples' and local communities' languages, wisdom and knowledge systems, and traditional crafts and materials. Although some of these aspects are discussed in Paper 4, this section investigates LRGs' responses to both climate-related extreme weather events and slow-onset disasters with a specific emphasis on citizen engagement.

Cities and territories require preventive and responsive actions to act upon a wide spectrum of risks. Intensive, large-scale disasters such as floods and droughts are expected to become even more severe and frequent, an issue that is clearly on the radar of LRGs. Extensive risk – that is, risk associated with low severity, high-frequency and localized events – affects humans on a recurrent basis, with significant implications for their health, prosperity and wellbeing, as well as for the environment. While LRGs do not have the power to make all the necessary changes alone, they can play a pivotal role, working upwards with national governments and international organizations and downwards with grassroots organizations and the communities they represent and serve.

The experience of **Rotterdam** (the Netherlands) exemplifies some of the complexities encountered by LRGs to respond to the climate crisis. This city has launched the WeatherWise programme, bringing together local government actors, social entrepreneurs, the private sector, NGOs and citizens to climate-proof the city in an inclusive way. Each of the city's 42 neighbourhoods has its own approach to ensure that context-specific needs are at the forefront of climate adaptation. LRGs in **Barcarena** (Brazil), **Afadzato South District** (Ghana), **Nancy** (France) and **Freetown** (Sierra Leone) are committed to ambitious tree planting and urban reforestation programmes

that simultaneously reduce the impact of heatwaves and strengthen local capacities and livelihoods. **Kadıköy** in Istanbul (Turkey) aims to increase its green spaces and reduce urban temperature through zoning plans and the rehabilitation of streams.

While the initiatives undertaken by metropolitan areas and large cities are well-documented, it is worth remembering that **the bulk of the transition towards an urban world is taking place in intermediary and small cities, a reality often overlooked**.[51] A recent review of participatory budgeting practices includes several examples from smaller and mid-sized cities such as **Dalifort-Foirail** (Senegal) and **Pemba** (Mozambique), demonstrating the power of engaging citizens and communities in climate mitigation and adaptation responses.[52] The review shows that citizen participation can and should be a transformative tool in tackling climate change, while building trust in government through direct democratic practices.

As highlighted before, climate finance is a critical concern for LRGs, which explains why some cities have started to develop a portfolio of financial mechanisms to complement their own investments. **Paris** (France) is a pioneer in this regard. Its local government launched the first-ever city "climate bonds" in 2015, raising 336 million USD for mitigation and adaptation projects, while instilling confidence in suppliers of green products and services. However, worldwide, there is a persistent and strong divide between the Global North and the Global South in terms of financing local development. Out of the total flows raised in 2015 in the green bond market, approximately 2.2 billion USD were directed towards cities in the Global South, compared to 17 billion USD in the Global North.[53] The financial flows available to cities in both contexts are further skewed by their respective sources. Cities in the North typically use their own municipal issuance power, while benefiting from development finance institutions (DFIs) by linking city-based projects to their green bonds. In contrast, the smaller financial flows available to cities in the Global South for climate responses come almost entirely from DFIs. In combination, **multilateral and bilateral DFIs send more green bond flows to city projects in the Global North than in the Global South**.

The 2022 UNFCCC COP27 advanced international commitment to a dedicated fund for loss and damage. However, most initiatives underway still rely on finance through adaptation, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian funds. Furthermore, although there is a long genealogy of climate-induced loss and damage impacts, **initiatives tend to focus on easily quantified and monetized losses and damages**, at the expense of non-economic and less tangible ones. In 2016, the Pacific Islands' leaders endorsed the region's first Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific,[54] a comprehensive policy for governing climate change and disaster-related risk towards the realization of the SDGs. In contrast with the 2015 Paris Agreement, this initiative covers a wide range of climate- and disaster-induced loss and damage mechanisms.[55] For example, Fiji developed a Climate Relocation Fund and Planned Relocation Guidelines with funds earmarked for more than 30 at-risk communities' future relocation.[56] Box 4 examines the range of initiatives undertaken in this regard in the archipelago of Kiribati.

BOX 4

Advancing loss and damage mechanisms in the Pacific Islands

Kiribati is formed by 32 atoll islands and has a fast-growing population of around 110,000 spread over an area of more than five million km². As a member of the Alliance of Small Island States, Kiribati has campaigned for loss and damage mitigation mechanisms within the UNFCCC since the early 1990s. It is one of the first nations in the world seeking to advance climate justice through a climate migration strategy entitled "migrate with dignity."[57] This initiative includes regionally negotiated labour programmes (such as the Recognized Seasonal Employment scheme with New Zealand and the Seasonal Worker Programme with Australia), coupled with large investments by the national government and international donors in education and English skills to enhance people's chances to migrate. Since 2014, the government has purchased land in other Pacific Islands for planned relocation. While these initiatives were taken at the national level, they open a new framing for LRGs to engage in migration-friendly international politics and concrete local, social and connective solutions to support climate migrants' self-determination, yet also calling for simultaneous action to prevent and adapt to climate change impacts.

Current debates identify the need for a human rights-based approach to ensure that duty bearers such as local and national governments fulfil their responsibility to meet the needs of citizens and communities affected by climate change. Such an approach should also enhance duty bearers' responsiveness to ever-changing emerging challenges within their territories and beyond their administrative boundaries, as well as localize loss and damage financial mechanisms with due consideration of non-economic losses from climate change.

Commoning environmental assets and services

This pathway examines how **LRGs find ways of commoning privatized, unequally distributed or degraded environmental common assets and services, while preventing green gentrification resulting from the mismanagement of land markets**. Commoning involves restoring the environmental and social functions of cities and territories to advance everyone's wellbeing and the liveability of live-in environments. In a programme by the municipality of **Entebbe** (Uganda), migrants, refugees and other people living around the Namiiro Wetland receive training and employment opportunities in wetland restoration, while the city on Lake Victoria is promoted as a destination for ecotourism. The programme follows a multifunctional approach to income generation through sustainable employment while protecting wetlands and providing incentives for local inhabitants to prevent further settlements in a high-risk area. Similarly, and

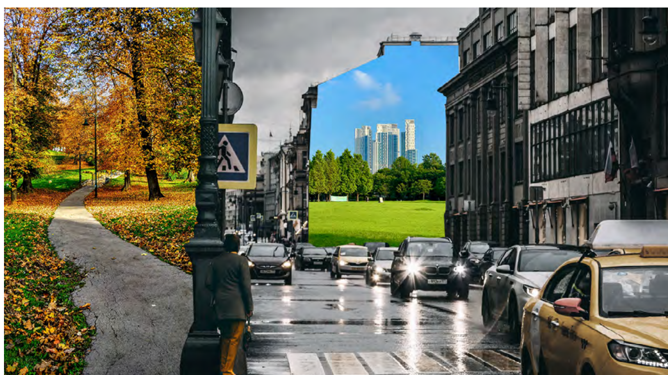
ranking high in terms of political commitment to value nature, the efforts made in **Peñalolén** (Chile) prioritize citizens' quality of life and reduced exploitation of natural resources (see Box 5).

BOX 5

Peñalolén's CSO-driven approach to land use planning

In **Peñalolén**, in 2009, an investment-friendly municipal land use plan triggered widespread resistance. CSOs feared that its approval would further increase land prices, lead to the displacement of low-income communities and make significant changes to the commune's landscape and ecological infrastructure. After the initial plan was refused in 2011 after a no-vote in the communal plebiscite, a civil society-driven platform –the Council of Social Movements of Peñalolén– promoted a new land use plan and took actions towards the social integration of migrant communities, together with the development of accessible public spaces and social housing in strategic areas to improve access to housing and basic services to reduce social segregation in the commune. In addition, efforts were made to sustain green and wild areas over time and protect them from being commodified. An assessment of the ecology of the commune's landscape is currently being carried out to propose biological corridors that respond to challenges such as heatwaves and to enhance aquifer recharge. This proposal was mobilized under a "right to the city" framing, in which the preservation of the commons played a key role.

LRGs are also confronting green gentrification and its consequences, such as the displacement of the very residents meant to benefit from green and recreational assets. Tools commonly used to combat green gentrification include eco-district zoning, interim green spaces on vacant lots, green amenity planning in large-scale developments and opening of private green spaces to the public. Other tools used are developer requirements (e.g. developer fees directed to green funding), financial schemes (green bonds, green climate-resilient infrastructure in vulnerable neighbourhoods) and other regulations on green space management and food security and sovereignty. The following example from **Portland**, Oregon (USA) shows how a combination of those tools can protect housing rights and produce environmental benefits (see Box 6).[58]



BOX 6

Combatting gentrification in Portland, Oregon

Portland's history of racial discrimination in housing is tightly linked to major infrastructure developments that displaced residents. Since the late 1980s, the city implemented revitalization programmes that produced gentrification, disrupting African American neighbourhoods. After another development was proposed in 2013, community leaders demanded investment from the city and managed to mobilize 20 million USD in urban renewal funds to support affordable housing in the area.

Moreover, through an extensive community outreach process, the Portland Housing Bureau developed a Neighborhood Housing Strategy that included, for example, loan assistance for house repairs and the building of new affordable housing. In 2019, rent caps were introduced to protect tenants from evictions. In the Cully neighbourhood, local NGOs have started a project to build affordable housing and businesses with residents. They also trained 200 residents in environmental management and landscaping. Hence, Portland demonstrates a model of tackling gentrification through measures to increase affordability, protect the most marginalized populations and create capacities and opportunities for income generation.

5. LRGs governing and managing complex legacies, trajectories and emergencies

The four pathways have shown how LRGs are at the forefront of urban innovations towards environmentally and socially just cities in a context of multiple and intersecting crises. This section identifies the remaining challenges as well as capacities built, drawing on reflections from LRGs involved in the cases above, as well as others.

Enabling institutional environment

LRGs have used multiple tactics and strategies to increase their room for manoeuvre and actively drive the four presented pathways. In the absence of, or complementary to, national mechanisms, several LRGs and community groups have developed **local rules and incentive structures** to advance the implementation of environmental strategies. In **Afadzato South District** (Ghana), local byelaws were enacted to reduce disaster risk by preventing practices such as bush burning and unauthorized land uses. Importantly, LRGs have developed not only rules but also local regulatory compliance mechanisms, such as in the case of **Peñalolén** (Chile). Moreover, local prohibitions are closely linked to incentive structures provided by LRGs. In **Viña del Mar** (Chile), a municipal environmental certification system acts as a driver to improve

waste management, protect ecosystems and encourage responsible human-animal relationships.

A second key strategy relates to the **creation and institutionalization of LRG agencies and departments** that work across relevant sectors with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This has been particularly useful considering that LRGs increasingly perform the role of a facilitator and interlocutor in promoting just urban and territorial development together with a range of other stakeholders. **Buenos Aires** (Argentina), for example, followed a process of allocating responsibilities across a wide range of units and departments to fulfil differential roles in environmental agendas – including land use planning, finance, human resources and community relations. LRGs take a **systems approach to territorial planning and management**, which cuts across sectorial and administrative divisions (see Paper 5 on multilevel governance). However, they face several administrative governance challenges that are and will continue to be exacerbated under complex emergency situations unless bold governance arrangements at all levels are made.[59]

Resources

The trends and pathways have demonstrated that LRGs are challenged to identify and leverage regular as well as exceptional and flexible resources to be responsive to slow, rapid, anticipated and surprising changes. The **mobilization and (re)distribution of financial resources through innovations in existing funding mechanisms, as well as the localization of new and emerging funds**, are fundamental, as has become apparent in discussions around financing climate change mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. The Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility is a noteworthy example of how shortcomings in funding – for non-economic loss and damage, as well as for displaced people, migrants and those evicted and relocated – need to be addressed in the design of inclusive and sustainable policies.

In **Peñalolén** (Chile), the mobilization of resources has been possible due to a management model that established public-private alliances and actively pursued attracting regional funds. Being part of pacts and collaboration networks such as the Race to Zero or the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, as well as participating in international monitoring and evaluation processes, thereby helped to increase visibility and recognition of the municipality's environmental programmes.

The mobilization of resources often goes together with ongoing **decentralization processes**, as has been seen in **Basse** (the Gambia). Here, an increase in local autonomy and fiscal control, as outlined in the Basse Area Council's Strategic Plan 2019–2022, is expected to benefit necessary investments in climate-resilient development through reforestation programmes and the construction of adequate drainage systems. The importance of decentralization processes is relevant not only in terms of access to, and control over, financial resources but also to land use and planning decisions. In **Afadzato South District** (Ghana), the Physical Planning Department, for example, is a key enabler of the Green Afadzato Project, which plants trees to reduce heat impacts. The department leads local planning of farmlands and industrial, commercial and residential land uses – capacities required to use resources to produce public value.

Capacities

The challenges and pathways presented in the previous sections require different staff capacities from those often existing in LRGs. This makes **formal and informal learning and training** essential. LRGs have invested in strengthening skills and techniques, such as dedicated training in tree planting in Ghana or remote sensing and urban wetland declarations in Chile. They have further participated in special training organized by national entities, such as disaster risk management and risk profiling. Moreover, LRGs have also facilitated learning on the job, such as during the implementation of the river rehabilitation and re-naturing project in **Granollers** (Spain).

LRGs have also shaped their recruitment strategies to attract professionals with the required skills and competencies. For instance, the government of **Peñalolén** (Chile) has rapidly expanded local capacities by creating an Environment Department with more than 60 professionals working in four areas (climate change, waste and environmental education, responsible animal ownership and conservation). It continuously strengthens staff capacities through in-house workshops and training.

Citizen engagement

Linked to the previous three areas, there are several mechanisms and strategies through which LRGs engage with and support CSOs' processes to advance the SDGs and work towards socially and environmentally just cities. Many LRGs take seriously their mandate to prioritize citizen participation in environmental planning, beyond consultation processes, through public councils among other citizen engagement mechanisms.[60] For instance, the municipality of **Viña del Mar** (Chile) has a dedicated Department of Citizen Participation, while other LRGs delegate decision-making powers through processes such as participatory budgeting, which has been a par-

ticularly productive mechanism in addressing immediate local needs.

The quality of engagement refers to the collaborative production and follow-through of strategic action plans to foster the i**nstitutionalization of LRG-CSO relations**. Considering the critical role of the private sector – often in reproducing unsustainable production and consumption patterns – it is key to explore how LRGs can establish productive and effective dialogue and action to tackle business-as-usual and greenwashing practices.

In this regard, several LRGs follow **networked approaches**, in which they collaborate with private sector and/or CSOs on issues related to the renewable energy sector, labour market inclusion and migration policies, among others. The UCLG Town Hall is an example of a space for dialogue and interaction between different internationally organized civil society constituencies and LRGs to jointly define global policies. Driven by civil society, it allows different international stakeholders to collaborate in defining policy priorities and localizing global agendas. However, in general, it remains challenging for LRGs to assume their roles as facilitators, as they often rely on public-private partnerships and business investors. This, in turn, brings a bias towards investment-friendly partnerships, which rarely advance radical aspirations for structural change.

6. LRGs forefronting transformative action towards just and sustainable cities and territories

Ongoing intersecting crises have shown that **prioritizing and fulfilling LRGs' commitments to a radically different pathway than business as usual is no longer an option but imperative**. As discussed throughout the paper, this requires LRGs embarking on four interrelated pathways: **decoupling, restoring, localizing and commoning**. These pathways highlight why and how cities and territories can transcend their economic dependence on natural resource extraction, carbon-intensive development, climate-induced risk and loss and damage, systemic damage to their ecological infrastructure and the erosion of their social and ecological functions, and instead work for the benefit of all human and non-human species.

The negative trends described in this paper are increasingly exacerbated by the financialization of urban life and the material processes that support it, the obduracy of technological systems that disregard environmental processes and the colonial and patriarchal legacies that produce and reproduce socio-environmental injustices. As a result, vast majorities of people who are treated as dispensable minorities due to their gender, class, race, age, disabilities or location in politically overlooked cities and territories are bearing environmental burdens while being excluded from environmental benefits.

This paper has shown the range of mechanisms that LRGs are pioneering and mobilizing to advance just transitions that leave no one and no place behind. Such mechanisms are typically concrete and strategic attempts to develop new imaginaries and boldly reinvent planning processes. Yet, the task at hand is of such a magnitude that local policies and actions need to be constantly assessed, considering their transformative aspirations and power. This requires bearing in mind the following considerations:

- Commitments towards just and sustainable cities and territories, including SDG 11, have long been in the hands of negotiations mediated by international organizations and national governments. **LRGs need to deepen and expand their critical engagement with such processes, pushing their boundaries through new forms of multilateralism and spearheading more ambitious and anticipatory actions** (see Paper 5). LRG capacities, resources and mandates need to be urgently enhanced to fully enable LRGs to play a transformative role. Such a role can only be supported by expanding and deepening a new social contract that treats ordinary citizens, local communities and organized civil society as critical allies in the exercise of direct democracy.

- **Transformative change is not the outcome or aggregation of isolated responses.** It requires thinking not only outside the box of municipal governance and planning, but also beyond jurisdictional boundaries by seeking networked approaches and drawing on the power of the municipalist movement.

- **Commoning cities and territories means restoring their collective social and ecological functions.** Efforts to do so require political commitment and bold interventions in the property market, which are often in opposition to the interest of well-organized urban property-owning classes and speculative gains (see Paper 1). Adopting a rights-based approach is essential in this regard. It requires engaging with the full cycle of collective redistribution, recognition and protection of diversity and equality, while building parity-oriented political participation and fulfilling fundamental citizen rights.

- **Finally, the importance of adopting a forward-looking perspective cannot be emphasized enough.** LRGs are intervening in today's cities and territories and, in doing so, they are shaping our common urban future in fundamental ways, either by reinforcing path dependency or by unlocking new possibilities and trajectories that in turn impact the right of present and future generations to social and environmental justice.

Forefronting transformative action towards just and sustainable cities and territories ultimately requires re-embedding them into their life-support systems, while tackling simultaneously questions of sufficiency, efficiency and equality.

7. Advancing progressive municipalism: LRGs' pathways to advance the localization of the SDGs

The five papers have presented **initiatives from over 100 local and regional governments (LRGs)** throughout the world, while analyzing how these initiatives contribute to accelerating progress towards the fulfilment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, and through it, the SDGs in general. These examples show how LRGs, in alliance with their communities, are contributing to the different dimensions of SDG 11 by focusing on fulfilling the right to adequate housing and basic services (SDG target 11.1); promoting feminist approaches to sustainable, inclusive and participatory planning (SDG targets 11.2, 11.3 and 11.7); pursuing environmental justice and integrated and circular approaches (SDG targets 11.5, 11.6, 11.7 and 11.b); protecting and safeguarding culture and heritage (SDG target 11.4); and promoting more balanced and equal urban and territorial systems (SDG target 11.a).

Innovative LRG experiences, drawing upon engagement across networks of LRGs and with diverse public, civil society and private institutions, have become the cornerstone of progress towards sustainable, inclusive and just cities and territories. LRGs' experiences further elicit why realizing SDG 11 requires a human rights-based approach that advances equality in full recognition of people's diversity, as well as a perspective that goes beyond urban boundaries and recognizes urban impacts at the regional, national and global levels. Rearticulating principles and practices based on a multilevel governance approach, which in itself serves as an enabling environment for SDG localization, becomes a pressing need.

Together, the papers propose different pathways – routes for transformative actions to advance and accelerate progress – towards SDG 11. However, as the assessment of trends in each paper demonstrates, the efforts that have been put into the implementation of SDG 11 to date remain insufficient to reverse the structural inequalities as well as social and environmental injustices exacerbated by multiple, intersecting crises.

The papers advance policies and practices that could accelerate progress towards SDG 11 and propel urban transformation, including:

- Policies that adopt an active approach to **acknowledge, protect and fulfil the right to housing and basic services**: These include policies that respond to evictions and address exclusion and discrimination by promoting and enforcing regulations of land and housing markets. They also support more inclusive and responsive forms of tenure security and universal access to basic services, including through the acknowledgement of and support for commoning practices.

- Policies that **foster urban planning to reduce fragmentation and segregation**: Mainstreaming an intersectional feminist approach to urban planning is key to foster more inclusive and equal cities. Emphasizing accessibility, proximity and care ensures that the exercise of rights and the use of public space are inclusive and accommodating for all, particularly structurally marginalized populations.

- Policies that emphasize the need to **prevent extractivist approaches to natural resources and the depletion of the public commons**: Such policies address the challenges of green gentrification and work towards rectifying historical deficits and their current manifestations in socio-spatial inequalities. Revitalizing and restoring urban ecological infrastructure through inclusive citizen engagement are crucial. The promotion of just re-naturing processes to ensure healthy cities and planet preservation hinges on the decoupling, restoring, localizing and commoning pathways. It also requires advocating for circular cities and regional initiatives to reduce pressure on natural resources.

- Policies that **acknowledge and resolutely act on cultural dimensions to accelerate SDG implementation**: Cultural rights-based actions, programmes and policies strongly influence the achievement of the SDGs. It is essential to link them with the promotion, protection and preservation of heritage, as well as cultural diversity, intersectional feminist perspectives and climate action. This approach should be at the core of effectively promoting local economic development, reimagining growth-oriented models and making a commitment to sustainable management of heritage sites and tourism attraction.

- Policies that seek to **advance effective multilevel governance**: Unbalanced and unequal urban systems require multilevel governance arrangements with respect for the principle of subsidiarity at the core. The redistribution of powers, responsibilities and resources, as well as enhanced democratic participation, transparency and accountability, can promote pluricentric and inclusive urban and territorial systems that leave no one and no territory behind.

The different papers also highlight four key cross-cutting elements that should be mainstreamed across LRG policies, practices and governance arrangements:

- **Addressing historical and contemporary structural inequalities from a feminist perspective**: This involves recognizing the diversity of entitlements, needs, experiences and capacities of people who disproportionately face discrimination and margin

alization, to ensure that no one and no place are left behind.

- **Strengthening meaningful, transparent and sustained citizen participation and inclusive engagement, while tackling deeply ingrained power asymmetries**: This entails informed and sustained citizen participation in decision-making processes and requires inclusive governance systems to co-create interventions with marginalized groups.

- **Developing institutional arrangements and regulatory frameworks that seek to decentralize powers, responsibilities and resources based on the subsidiarity principle**: Strengthened national, regional and local policy and planning can help to achieve balanced and equitable urban and territorial systems.

- **Adopting rights-based, intersectional and often explicitly feminist approaches to planning, policy and practice**: Such approaches expand the imagination of the roles LRGs can play, as well as their room for manoeuvre, in realizing SDG 11 to counter exclusion, marginalization and discrimination against people in light of their class, gender, age, ethnicity, race, religion, disabilities and sexual orientation. The advancement of concepts such as "human rights cities" has already manifested in the creation of human rights departments and offices for non-discrimination, in addition to the safeguarding of property's social function.

Finally, the five papers evidenced the call for stronger urban and regional roles in localizing the SDGs. Concerted actions propel community-led and LRG-supported initiatives that promote inclusiveness, address inequalities and exclusion and co-create more just and sustainable urban and territorial futures. Change is not only a matter of resources but also of fundamentally reshaping relationships and roles or, in other words, a governance approach. Embracing the synergies between human rights, intersectional feminism and multilevel governance, a progressive municipalist movement may drive forward the localization of the SDGs.

Notes

* For more information on the notion of pathways, see United Cities and Local Governments (2022) *GOLD VI. Pathways to urban and territorial equality: Addressing inequalities through local transformation strategies.* Global Observatory of Local Democracy and Decentralization, United Cities and Local Governments, Barcelona, October 2022.

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Supported by:

Co-funded by the European Union

Facilitated by: