Contribution to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights as part of consultation for report following Human Rights Council resolution 39/7 on Local Government and Human Rights

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This submission is submitted by Mistra Urban Futures, an international research centre on urban sustainability, on behalf of the research team of the comparative transdisciplinary research project "Implementing the New Urban Agenda and The Sustainable Development Goals: Comparative Urban Perspectives". This submission aims to contribute particularly to point 3 of the request for input "ways in which local governments raise awareness about, and contribute, to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the New Urban Agenda, including by ensuring the participation by local stakeholders". Our contribution is based on the evidence collected from the project thus far, which involves seven cities around the world.

About the research project

Mistra Urban Futures is undertaking a comparative project to monitor and analyse the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular focus on SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and other aspects of the Goals that relate to urban issues, and of the New Urban Agenda in seven cities on four continents. The cities involved are Buenos Aires (Argentina), Cape Town (South Africa), Gothenburg (Sweden), Kisumu (Kenya), Malmö (Sweden), Sheffield (UK), and Shimla (India). The selection of cities provides considerable diversity of context, urban population and other key variables and it also covers at least one urban area in each major continental region except North America and Oceania. The project started in mid-2017 and will run until the end of 2019. The aims of the project are to analyse how cities are engaging with, interpreting and implementing the New Urban Agenda and the urban related Sustainable Development Goals as well as to work with the cities to support their understanding and implementation of these global initiatives and to facilitate cross-city learning and interaction. The project's website[1] includes additional information about the project and it will be updated with the project publications (which include reports, peer-review academic article and policy briefs) throughout the duration of the project.

The project follows a transdisciplinary knowledge co-production approach, involving academics, NGO representatives, and city officials. Each city has a local research team working directly with city officials, using a variety of methods of engagement.

Challenges and Opportunities of Localising the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda

This submission includes both the challenges and opportunities that cities are facing when localising Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda, exemplified through the experiences of our case study cities. Localising these agendas implies adapting them to the city level - a necessary step as

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[1] https://www.mistraurbanfutures.org/en/project/implementing-new-urban-agenda-and-sustainable-development-goals-comparative-urban

both agendas were ratified and are expected to be officially reported at the national level. At the same time, the relevance of these agendas to cities is undeniable. Most indicators, including the ones under SDG 11 cannot be achieved without the efforts at the local level by local authorities and other local stakeholders.[2]

- Cities are key actors in the implementation and achievement of the SDGs and the NUA, however there are boundary challenges that need to be taken into consideration. These **boundary challenges** include the fact that urban areas often span beyond administrative boundaries, in some cases, while in others areas with rural characteristics are found within cities' municipal boundaries. Both conditions require attention to ensure that indicator data collected at the local level is explicit on the boundary of the area as well as the economic and geographic conditions within that boundary. In Kisumu, for example, part of the city administrative boundary includes rural areas, and thus data on population density can significantly undermine overcrowding conditions within the built-up area.

  Another important boundary issue is the mandate that different municipalities have to govern their own territory. The powers of our case study cities vary significantly, with the Municipal Corporation of Shimla having the most limited mandate as all social and land use planning issues are the responsibility of the state and national levels. The varying mandates highlight the need for the collaboration between different levels of government and a range of actors in order to achieve the goals stated in these agendas.

- Another challenge in our case study cities, particularly those in the Global South, is that there are high levels of **informality** (both of housing and employment) and official data often does not accurately depict living and employment conditions.

- **Multi-stakeholder partnerships** can contribute to increasing awareness and engagement with these agendas. Within our project, we have set up co-production partnerships in each of the case study cities between academics and city officials. In Buenos Aires the partnership also includes a civil society representative (CELS – Centre for Legal and Social Studies). In Shimla, the research team is represented by Nagrika, a social enterprise working on small and medium-size cities; the research team is collaborating with the Municipal Corporation of Shimla.

  These partnerships allow the local researchers to have closer access and better understanding of the localisation of the SDGs and the NUA in each city. In the cities where there was little engagement with these agendas (which was the case in several of the case study cities when the project started in mid 2017), these partnerships have contributed to create awareness about the agendas and to get discussions around them started within the municipalities. While the project cannot claim direct causality between our engagement with city officials and implementation of the agendas, the formalisation of these partnerships in several

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[2] For example, the UN synthesis report on SDG 11 also shows interlinkages with other SDGs, highlighting the role of local levels in achieving them. The report is available here: https://unhabitat.org/sdg-11-synthesis-report/

cities has been followed by increased interest and commitment in localising them.

In Sheffield, for instance, there has been little on-the-ground activity around the SDGs or NUA. Prior to working with the local research team, city partners in Sheffield were aware of, but not acting on implementing, these agendas. The absence of national guidance or priority-setting is one factor that has led to this situation. There is no clear rationale for city-regions to engage, and limited discussion of the potential of the new devolution context in the UK to promote these agendas. A consensus has now emerged between the research team and City Council officials around piloting and developing a policy evaluation tool using the SDG framework, with a particular focus on the co-benefits of infrastructure proposals that contribute to achieving SDG targets across multiple policy domains. The project has also served as a catalyst for a multi-stakeholder event that will allow various UK local authorities to meet and share best practices on the localisation of the SDGs.

In Shimla, the Municipal Corporation had not started working with the SDGs or the NUA in 2017 and in November 2018, the elected members of the Corporation unanimously signed a resolution committing to the SDGs, particularly the targets in the urban goal (SDG 11). The resolution acknowledges the knowledge partnership with Nagrika and the involvement in our international research project. The resolution is a reflection of municipal government's willingness and initiative to engage on global issues such as sustainable urban development. By committing to developing an integrated strategy to achieve relevant SDGs, the resolution also provides an opportunity to MCS, (and other cities) to converge its multiple efforts and develop synergies among them under a globally recognised monitoring framework.

In Kisumu, meetings between the research team and the Kenyan national agencies in charge of SDGs implementation led to Kisumu being selected as a pilot study on how cities in the country are localising the global agendas. A local working team composed of researchers, city and county representatives has been set-up with monthly meetings and 2 meetings per year are to be facilitated with the national level; the first two meetings involving city, county, national and civil society representatives took place in May and July 2018. Further, the SDGs have been mainstreamed within the 2018-2022 County Integrated Development Plan and captured in the Annual Development Plan for implementation by the various departments at the county. An SDG Unit has therefore been formed at the county and is being coordinated from the Directorate of Economic Planning and Development at the County. The SDG Unit will have responsibility for tracking SDG indicators at the local level, setting and reviewing county-relevant targets, and making national level recommendations regarding SDG integration, implementation and localisation. This will include particular consideration of Goal 11. At the national level, the Council of Governors has established a secretariat to guide the process for localisation of SDGs implementation at the County level.

As the cases in Shimla and Kisumu have shown, the partnerships have contributed to setting up working agendas in all the cities where the researchers-city officials team agree on a set of topics to work jointly. In Cape Town, the

joint work has included carrying out workshops and seminars with city officials from various departments to understand the extent to which and how different departments are trying to align their departmental and/or transversal projects to the SDGs, and specifically to SDG 11. As a result of the research-city collaboration, Cape Town – a member of the 100 Resilient Cities network – has also started working on mapping the linkages between its draft Resilience Strategy and the SDGs with a view of localising the SDGs through the lens of resilience.

In Buenos Aires, the researchers–city officials–civil society team has been jointly working on methodological definitions, actors' mapping and the construction of indicators as part of the localisation process of Agenda 2030. The first part of the joint work prioritised the adaptation to the city level of SDG 11 indicators, as well as those indicators linked to housing deficit, access to basic services and participatory processes of re-urbanisation and integration plans for city slums. With this aim, the team worked on SDGs 1, 6, 7, 11 and 16[3], and discussed definitions and measurements with other departments of Buenos Aires City Government. Currently, the City is working on the adaptation of all the SDGs to the city level; a work that involves all city government agencies.

The latter two examples show that these partnerships are not only contributing to advancing the localisation of these global agendas but also facilitating the discussions between different departments within city administrations. Agenda 2030 and the NUA are cross-cutting and promote a holistic approach that integrates the three dimensions of sustainability, the social, ecological and economic. Facilitating discussions across city departments is therefore of high importance as sectorial institutional silos still prevail in our case study cities, presenting a significant challenge for transversal work.

At the same time, the work that most of our case study cities have carried out in connection to the SDGs has focused on internal analyses and discussions within the city government and other levels of government, but with very limited engagement of other non-governmental actors. An exception is Buenos Aires which has developed several communication and awareness-raising initiatives, particularly aimed at youth. These initiatives include an SDG public mural painted by citizens during the Youth Olympics in 2018 and video games connected to each SDG. Given the complexity of sustainability issues, no single actor can fully address the goals of Agenda 2030 and the NUA without forming partnerships with different types of actors. In most of our case study cities, it is still unclear how government will engage and the roles that citizens and the private sector will play in implementing and monitoring these agendas.

In short, addressing the SDGs requires co-ordinated and co-produced approaches. Our work suggests that universities can play important roles in generating debate and action around the SDGs and the NUA in partnership with local authorities and other stakeholders. It also highlights the need to work across both horizontal and vertical institutional boundaries and with a wide

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[3] The adaptation of SDG 16 was done in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program.

range of actors within and outside government, particularly to identify, access and analyse knowledge held in different places to generate strategic sustainable urban transformation processes.

- **National guidance** on how to localise these agendas, including how to report on the work linked to these agendas has been limited and slow, but increasing in a few countries. In Sweden, the National Action Plan for Agenda 2030 adopted by the Swedish Government in June 2018, recognises the important role of regional and local governments in achieving the SDGs. While the action plan does not provide concrete guidance on how local governments can localise the Agenda, a number of studies and initiatives are commissioned as part of the action plan to address this. This includes developing a set of voluntary local indicators (including both regional and municipal-level indicators) based on the SDGs. The work is led by Statistics Sweden, the Agenda 2030 delegation and the Council for the Promotion of Municipal Analyses, and includes a number of municipalities (including Malmö) and regional governments as part of the working group. The work will be completed by March 2019. In addition, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL) and the UN Association of Sweden have launched a joint communication project (*Glokala Sverige*) to increase knowledge and commitment of the SDGs in municipalities, county councils and regions. Seven municipalities and county councils are participating as a pilot reference group during 2019. In Sweden, there is no statutory requirement for municipalities, county councils or regions to work with the SDGs; SKL suggests, instead, that SDGs localisation should build on voluntary commitment and political anchoring that is responsive to local contexts.

Guidance can also be, and is being, provided from lower levels of government. In India, state-level government in Himachal Pradesh, where Shimla is located, has provided guidance through its Planning Department to various state-level departments regarding the constitution of working groups to address the SDGs and map them to departmental priorities. Working groups have been asked to formulate a short-term action plan (3 years) and a medium-term strategy (7 years) towards achieving the SDGs. To date, SDG work in India has focussed on the national and state level rather than cities, however city engagement is on the rise, as showcased by the previously mentioned resolution signed by Shimla.

Some municipalities have started working with the SDGs and have not awaited national guidance, such as Malmö, which was the first city in Sweden to commit (in 2015) to integrating Agenda 2030 into its planning and operations, with the ambition of using it, by 2020, as a framework for its municipal budget. In the UK, local stakeholders have driven the small number of SDG localisation initiatives that exist in UK cities in the absence of national or local implementation guidance.

In Argentina, agencies were created at the national level to implement and disseminate Agenda 2030, including the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies. This body is the coordination of all Public Ministries for the adaptation of the SDGs to the national context and its follow-up. In addition, the Ombudsman's Office incorporated a monitoring mechanism in compliance with the SDGs indicators. Finally, from the legislative sphere, a Parliamentary

Observatory was created whose main tasks are to disseminate this agenda within parliament, as well as analysing how new enacted laws can contribute to SDGs achievement.

However, smaller municipalities may not have the capacity to undertake a full localisation process and thus both national guidance, but also local political buy-in is crucial. A top-down or mandatory approach for implementing the SDGs and the NUA is not recommended. Rather what is needed is a set of guidelines and frameworks. Governments' SDGs and NUA action plans should be supported at the highest levels of Government and should include empowerment of cities and local governments to develop appropriate mechanisms to achieve the SDGs, the benefits of using the SDGs as a sustainability framework, country-specific guidance for local authorities, voluntary local and regional indicators, and initiatives to support and embed SDG localisation. The SDGs should be seen as a guiding framework rather than prescriptive or restrictive. The national and regional guidance then should be locally adapted to address the local specific needs, challenges and priorities.

Considerable resources are required to bring data together to report on the SDGs and the NUA in such a way as to support evidence-based policy-making at the local level. It is appropriate to consider how local governments can be resourced, supported and involved in the data collection required to mobilise as well as monitor progress on the SDGs and the NUA in order to achieve more sustainable urban development.

- There is limited awareness and implementation of the New Urban Agenda at the local level. Our research has found that very few of our case study countries and cities are explicitly working with the NUA. This is particularly the case at the city level, where the NUA has been mostly missing from any discussions related to sustainable urban development. At the same time, the development of national urban policies, one of the recommendations under the NUA, is in progress, albeit with limited involvement of local stakeholders. In Sweden, for example, the Government launched a 'Strategy for Living Cities' ('*Strategin för Levande städer'*) in April 2018, focussing on sustainable urban development and supporting national implementation of Goal 11 and the NUA. This is the first national strategy for sustainable urban development. The strategy sets out the direction of how cities in Sweden will become more sustainable and attractive for people. A special focus is on transport, green areas and construction. The strategy contains general goals for sustainable cities and new milestones to be included in the existing environmental target system. However, most of the goals focus on environmental issues and the strategy insufficiently engages with social aspects, such as segregation. Also, the strategy does not consider connections in the form of synergies and conflicts between environmental, economic and social issues. Furthermore, there was limited involvement from city governments and other local stakeholders in the development of the strategy. The same is the case in South Africa, where the Integrated Urban Development Framework was launched in October 2018 as a vehicle to localise the New Urban Agenda. However, guidance has been lacking as to how this Framework should be operationalised and implemented at the local level and how it relates to the implementation of SDG 11 and related goals.

As a concluding remark, there is a risk that the SDGs and NUA are simply used as a new set of reporting targets disconnected from systemic sustainable change. It is therefore crucial that national and local plans focus on long-term transformative thinking about how to create a more sustainable and just society and that resources and actors are mobilised to support this goal.

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