

**Opening statement by the Local Authorities Major Group**  
Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting  
13<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development  
28 February 2005

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Local government is the sphere of government closest to the people; it is at the local level that the provision of most basic services is ensured, including water, sanitation and the development of human settlements.

Local Authorities express their desire to see proposals for action put forward at the CSD-13 to strengthen the implementation of the commitments made at the Johannesburg Summit. Despite the proposals put forward on behalf of local authorities at the CSD-12 in 2004, enormous challenges still remain to be met.

Local Authorities have identified and submitted to the Secretary-General the following priorities for action in the areas of water, sanitation and human settlements:

1. Consolidating the links between the local and national spheres: **national plans for the reduction of poverty and for sustainable development should take local priorities into account to a greater degree** in order to guarantee a coherent approach; local governments should participate in national planning strategies in order that an integrated approach for the governance of water resources can be developed. National strategies need to foster dialogue and cooperation between urban and rural areas and encourage greater regional coherence.
2. Strengthening local governments: implementation of **capacity-building programmes for local decision-makers and local government staff**, namely

through the support of local government associations and cooperation between cities, in addition to national government and donor support.

3. **Decentralising regulatory powers and resources** (financial, technical and management). More financial autonomy at local level and respect for the principle of subsidiarity in order to establish closer relationships between service providers and recipients, improve the mobilisation of local resources and better direct them towards the reduction of poverty.

4. **Improving access to funding for service provision at the local level.** New mechanisms - involving national and local governments, international financial institutions and development cooperation agencies – should be provided in order to support investment, according to the recommendations put forward by the World Panel on Financing Water Infrastructure. Groupings of local associations at the regional level could also facilitate access to funding.

5. **Recognising the primary importance of good local governance for water and human settlements:** This should be based on respect for fundamental rights, particularly access to water in sufficient quantities and housing for all, taking account of gender and other inequalities, as well as respect for sustainable consumption and production thanks to collaboration between all stakeholders. This also involves the strengthening of competencies with a participatory approach. The implementation of local Agenda 21 programmes is an excellent example of the success of the participatory process (6,400 cities throughout the world). New partnership measures have likewise been developed between governments and grassroots organisations, for example the 'Localising the MDGs' and 'Capacity 2015' initiatives. Such initiatives need significant support at the national and international levels to ensure their effective application on the ground.

6. With regard to **human settlements** more specifically, tenure must be guaranteed to the inhabitants of 'informal' settlements in order to provide them with piped water and sewage systems. The delivery of basic services to informal and illegal settlements should be a commitment of all stakeholders.

7. Governments and international institutions should **encourage international cooperation among local governments** through the establishment of networks, the exchange of technical information and study visits in order to allow each city to learn from the experience of others. They should also provide additional support to urban development aid programmes. And finally, they should encourage local initiatives.

Local Authorities, as a Major Group, welcome the efforts being made by some national governments. There are excellent examples of cooperation between the national and local spheres in several countries, as was demonstrated by the side event run by Local Authorities at CSD-12. Local Governments have a great deal of experience and expertise in service provision and delivery, have tried and tested a wide variety of sustainable development initiatives, and can provide valuable inputs to national strategies.

Local governments appeal to Member States for greater involvement and support to local governments in order to accelerate the implementation of the commitments made at the Johannesburg and Rio Summits, as well as to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

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