

Breakfast Meeting

In preparations for the 2018 ECOSOC Special Meeting

“Towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all”

Local government

New York, 11 January 2018

Concept Note

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the role local governments have in promoting sustainable development. Local governments can adapt and pursue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensure their review while partnering with local communities.¹ ECOSOC likewise recognized the key role of local governments, given their proximity to the population and the grass-roots level.² In 2016, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration called for local authorities “to develop ‘local 2030 Agendas’ that place a special focus on ensuring that no one is left behind.”³

While a stand-alone goal on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements (SDG 11) acknowledges the power of urbanization and city leaders in driving development, nearly all SDGs have targets that will depend on actions at sub-national levels of government. Local governments and city leaders are well placed to understand and respond to people’s needs and have a particular role in ensuring equitable, timely and effective delivery of services. A little over half the global population now lives in cities and this figure is projected to grow to two-thirds of the global population by 2050.⁴ Thus, the implementation of the SDGs will depend in a large part on what will happen in cities.

Participation of all actors in economic, social and political life represents a precondition for sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies. To advance the SDGs, policies at the local level need to leave no one behind, work in integrated fashion and be effective and accountable. They need to be inclusive and ensure participation in decision making on public services and other issues (consistent with SDG 16.7 - Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels). Local level engagement can be effectively scaled up at the national level.

There is a wide range of platforms and mechanisms for stakeholder participation in decision making at the local level. These vary from local/regional advisory and consultative mechanisms to institutionalized decision-making forums. Participatory planning and

¹ Habitat III, paras 91 and 163

² E/RES/2017/23 and E/RES/2016/26

³ ECOSOC, Committee of Experts on Public Administration, Fifteenth session⁶

⁴ UNSDSN, SDG Cities Guide, Chapter 1

budgeting, in particular, have been promoted in Latin America, North America, Asia, Africa and Europe to empower local communities to engage with local governments to enhance service delivery and ensure that expenditures reach those that have the greatest needs.

Electronic platforms, including e-tools (e.g. online forums, polls, voting tools, e-complaint and petition tools) and open data foster dialogue, information-sharing, transparency and accountability both at the national and local levels. However, it is critical to address digital divide barriers and find ways to ensure that all segments of population – including the poorest and most vulnerable – are engaged.

The informal breakfast meeting will bring together Member States representatives, at the Ambassadorial level, officials from national and local governments, international organizations, academia and civil society to discuss the foregoing topics. The aim is to advance the substantive preparations of the ECOSOC Special Meeting on sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies, to be held in the spring of 2018.

The meeting will be opened by a keynote speaker and will be moderated by a United Nations official. To focus the discussions, participants may wish to prepare their intervention around the following questions:

- *Which innovative policies and institutional mechanisms can mobilize local communities and support participatory decision making as called for in the 2030 Agenda? How can these approaches catalyze achievement of the SDGs?*
- *How can innovative approaches, including e-tools and open data, be tapped to engage local communities and promote an accountable and inclusive government?*
- *How can coherent national-local government policies in support of the 2030 Agenda be best showcased and supported in international forums, including ECOSOC, its subsidiary bodies and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development?*