Breakfast Meeting with Local Government
In preparation for the 2018 ECOSOC Special Meeting
"Towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all"

8:30-9:45 AM, New York, 11 January 2018

<u>Highlights</u>

•   As Heads of State and Government recognized in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, local governments play a critical role in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Full Participation in the SDGs cannot be achieved without local governments.

•   Local governments are essential for promoting awareness about the SDGs among local communities and for mobilizing all stakeholders, including youth, in their implementation.

•   The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development needs to be translated into concrete actions at the local level. Most targets cannot be achieved without the involvement of local governments. The latter are best suited to develop policies that respond to local needs, catalyze local innovation and promote a territorial approach to development.

•   It is critical to build the capacity of local governments to engage local stakeholders, generate revenue, enhance data collection and analysis. This will support inclusive and evidence-based decision-making and enhance the delivery of public services at the local level.

<u>Informal Summary</u>

Localizing the 2030 Agenda

The local level is where the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development gets translated into concrete action and results. SDGs have targets that depend on actions at sub-national levels of government. The emphasis on the local dimension of the SDGs is within the Agenda 21 tradition of mobilizing local level action on sustainable development. It also benefits from lessons learned from the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and its thrust to address subnational disparities and regional specificities.

Local governments face numerous challenges to promote SDG implementation. These include lack of capacity and information as well as low participation in national policy-making. Challenges differ between developing, middle-income and developed countries and between cities. In Prague, Czech Republic, the municipality has engaged people in particular in areas related to housing, transportation and safety. Dakar, in Senegal, is seeking to overcome challenges related to overpopulation (over one quarter of the population of Senegal leaves in the city in less than one per cent of the country's territory) through strategies to mobilize the rest of the territory to attain sustainable development for all.

A significant problem in many instances is the lack of local government revenue and revenue capacity. National governments are often restrictive in terms of the resources they make available to the local government. According to one expert, between 50 and 60 per cent of national resources is earmarked for the sub-national level in Europe, the United States and Canada compared to ten per cent in Africa and 20 per cent in Latin America. Local government's ability and capacity to raise revenue is also curtailed by often restrictive rules. The result is often an inability to broaden the resource allocation

to cover the services people need. Some countries have made strides in addressing such challenges. By granting exceptional revenue autonomy at the local government level, Bolivia was able to counter the low local capacity that the country had in the 80s.

Disparities among regions and districts within a country require that policies and interventions address the specific development constraints and opportunities of each part of the territory. In Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and other cities in South Africa, for example, there are important disparities due to the country's history. Similarly, in Colombia, some areas enjoy very good levels of services but remote areas only receive basic services. In such contexts, national policies need to go beyond the "one size fits all approach" to address disparities in territorial development.

Integrated efforts are needed to respond to specific challenges of municipalities and ensure that sustainable development benefits all sub-regions and people. Multilevel governance and multilevel dialogue between central and local levels of government help to achieve such coherence and integration around SDG implementation. Vertical (national and sub-national government) and horizontal (government and stakeholder) coordination are key elements of policy coherence for sustainable development and resilience.

Successful strategies include inclusive planning to address disparities in infrastructure. The provision of services should ensure that the benefits of development are equally shared among well-off, middle and less developed territories. This approach helps fostering harmonious urban growth and development and allows to internalize sustainability imperatives.

OECD calls for a place-based, bottom-up and multi-sectoral approach to sustainable development that fosters strong participation of local communities, the local government and people. Bangladesh combines a top-down and bottom-up approach to SDG implementation. This approach is based on compacts between the Cabinet and each ministry as well as between ministries and subordinate agencies, down to the district and sub-district level.

The availability of timely and reliable data and indicators, helps regional and local government to monitor SDG progress. The World Bank and others emphasize that data platforms support evidence-based decision-making, better preparedness for disasters, enhanced allocation of funds among conflicting priorities, as well as more targeted and efficient service delivery (e.g. inclusive transport and energy services). Costa Rica, for instance, has developed a multidimensional poverty index to mobilize social institutions to combat poverty. Bangladesh used big data (e.g. analysis of electricity consumption data for the past 30 years) to address power outages. It also fostered the development of digital capacity in 500 local institutions for the delivery of online services.

The example of Prague and other cities show that there are multiple ways to engage people in decision-making. It is important to be clear from the outset on the focus and boundaries of participation. Participation has a cost which should be factored in. Innovative approaches like electronic platforms can further engage local communities and have great potentials in terms of promoting information sharing, transparency and accountability. Georgia leveraged on open government data (OGD) for ensuring participation at the local level and for promoting people engagement through electronic petitions and participatory budgeting mechanisms. Bangladesh has also developed an OGD platform with support by UN DESA.

Overall, bridging the digital divide (particularly access to high-speed internet in remote villages) and capacity gaps (e.g. of about 55,000 municipalities across Africa, Asia and Latin America, possibly only a thousand have the capacity to use and analyze sophisticated data) remain priorities in many developing countries.

The "glocal" dimension

The SDGs provide a new window of opportunity to address constraints and share responsibilities for development across national, regional and local levels of government. In Colombia, for instance, the national planning department has developed a programme called the "territorial kit" and conducted training of governors to raise awareness on the SDGs. Creating awareness among civil society organizations (CSOs), academia and the private sector can help promoting a more balanced SDG progress across all levels of government.

The local dimension can act as incubator for approaches that can be successfully applied at the national level. Many lessons and innovative approaches could be developed through greater mobilization of local communities. Stakeholder engagement, including youth, stimulates innovative ideas for advancing development.

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development allowed the sharing of lessons-learned and practices on SDG implementation at the local level. For example, Thailand has started a formal process of localizing the SDGs in 76 provinces.

The Czech Republic has been promoting participatory planning in Prague trough involving citizens in the planning of districts and other city infrastructure. The Czech Institute for planning and development has also created a manual to structure communication and foster the engagement of civil society organizations (CSO), business and people in district planning. In the United States of America, the City of New York has launched a Global Vision Urban Action programme as a local sustainable development plan which aims to connect local action with global goals.

Partnerships between central, local government and other shareholders - including from NGOs, the private sector and academia - help to mobilize resources, set priorities, and raise awareness about the relevance of SDGs in the local communities. Local governments can engage and benefit from stakeholders based in local communities given their specific expertise and networks. Partnerships among local governments, within and across countries, are mutually beneficial as they help to share experience and practices. Both North-South and South-South partnerships are key to overcome SDG localization challenges.

The United Nations and other international organizations can assist to set up a repository of good practices and experiences from different countries on successful inclusive approaches to SDG implementation at the local level. Development prizes/awards could also be granted to innovative initiatives.