Summary of the UN Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) SDGs in Action event at the Tenth World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi, UAE

"Inclusive Local Governance Solutions to Accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals and Leave No One Behind"

14-15h, 11 February, 2020

I.   Summary of Presentations and Session

The UN Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) held an "SDGs in Action" event on "Inclusive Local Governance Solutions to Accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals and Leave No One Behind" under the framework of the Tenth World Urban Forum (WUF10) in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The Tenth World Urban Forum ran from 8-13 February 2020 at Abu Dhabi's National Exhibition Centre (ADNEC) with the theme of "Cities of Opportunities: Connecting Culture and Innovation".[1] Given WUF10's focus on cities of opportunities, culture and innovation, UNOSD' SDGs in Action event took place on February 11, 2020 with presentations and a moderated discussion that emphasized the importance of innovative approaches, initiatives

---

[1] Background paper for Tenth World Urban Forum: https://wuf.unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/WUF10_Background_Paper-ENG.pdf

1

and tools to ensure a culture of inclusion locally and opportunities for inclusion to accelerate the SDGs and Leave No One Behind.

The event featured representatives from civil society and UN agencies that engaged in the interactive discussion to ensure outcomes on how to accelerate the SDGs in cities through inclusive planning and decision-making approaches, while also learning about new initiatives to for inclusive localization of the SDGs. The format included a first presentation on the overall context, followed by two presentations on the inclusion of vulnerable groups as defined in the 2030 Agenda, and a concluding presentation on technology as an enabler for accelerating inclusion. The presentation concluded with an interactive discussion with the audience and a closing statement.

The opening presentation on "A Decade of Action to Achieve the SDGs and LNOB" was given by Mr. Jean D'Aragon, Officer-in-Charge, UNOSD. It introduced the rational for the event and the necessity to focus on building local government skills, norms and cultural of engagement, knowing and prioritizing vulnerable groups to LNOB, and the benefit of inclusion for better city and community planning. The presentation noted that to ensure that "No One Is Left Behind", the 2030 Agenda calls for a special effort to ensure that countries make accelerated progress in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). [2] It noted that "During the 2018 International Mayors Forum in Lilongwe, Malawi mayors, civil society, international organizations all agreed that the "SDGs are a Peoples Agenda"". The presentation also introduced that in September 2019 during the UN Secretary-General's SDG Summit, Heads of State agreed on a Political Declaration adopted by the UN General Assembly calling for a focus on ten accelerators to ensure achievement of the SDGs in the coming decade (A/RES/74/4). The first and primary accelerator in the SDG Summit's Political Declaration is *"Leaving no one behind: we will place a focus on the poorest and most vulnerable in our policies and actions" while another accelerator focuses on "Bolstering local action to accelerate implementation".* It was noted that the Political Declaration also commits us to *"empower and support cities, local authorities and communities in pursuing the 2030 Agenda"* - but to do so we need to build culture, norms and skills on inclusion in planning, policymaking, decision-making and governance overall at the local level. This was a key recommendation from the session overall.

It was also noted that the 58th Commission on Social Development met in New York on the same dates highlighting that historically high levels of inequality are limiting opportunities for people around the world. It was also noted that the 2030 Agenda has identified specific vulnerable groups at risk of being left behind. These include persons with

Leaving No One Behind for the 2030 Agenda
Who is furthest behind?

Empowerment of the most vulnerable groups (Para. 23):
1. "Children and Youth,
2. Persons with disabilities (+80% live in poverty),
3. People living with HIV/AIDS,
4. Older persons,
5. Indigenous peoples,
6. Refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants and
7. "People in areas affected by complex humanitarian emergencies and in areas affected by terrorism".

---

[2] GA Resolution 70/1 of 21 October 2015. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

disabilities as a priority group (see figure).

The presentation also highlighted how cities are sharing their progress on the SDGs through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), where VLRs are themselves a tool to ensure inclusive

stakeholder engagement locally around SDG planning and policymaking.

New Taipei City representatives were present in the audience and took the floor to note that they had engaged citizens from nearly every vulnerable group across the city in the VLR process published in 2019. Their short statement highlighted how digital media and online consultations were part of their VLR process. The presentation concluded by underscoring that it was up to local governments to break the cultural and social barriers to inclusion that prevent engagement of these vulnerable groups in local planning and decision-making.

The second presentation by Mr. Murali Padmanabhan, Disability Inclusion Lab, Light for the World focused on "Persons with Disabilities" as a key vulnerable group for the 2030 Agenda, where 80% of Persons with Disabilities live in poverty today. He noted the importance of inclusion for SDG 11 and that there were a host of barriers (intentional and unintentional) that lead to a state of exclusion for people with disabilities in urban decision-making (See figure below).

These barriers to inclusion at local level include physical infrastructure barriers, legal and institutional barriers, environmental and attitudinal barriers that prohibit a culture of inclusion. He noted that for the 2030 Agenda this was an urgent problem if Leaving No One Behind and Reach the Furthest Behind first was to be achieved. His presentation noted that more than "half of persons with disabilities cities and towns that are not accessible" and that they estimate "nearly 1 billion urban dwellers with disabilities by 2050". He underscored the importance of working with national to local governments for adequate infrastructure and embedding "universal design" into planning from the start, as retrofitting was often more expensive.

3

The intervention also noted that the majority of urban growth is taking place in second/third tier cities, and there are marked capacity gaps among second and third tier cities to ensure inclusion and LNOB especially for persons with disabilities. Light for the World, a non-profit organization involved in advocating for inclusive planning for persons with disabilities noted that through its

Disability Inclusion Lab it trains cities in developing countries, including Least Developed Countries, at local level.

The presentation concluded that i) national and local legislation on accessibility should be harmonised, ii) all public buildings should lead by example in applying universal design and accessibility standards, and iii) that People with Disabilities should be included in local planning and policymaking to celebrate diversity in planning. Lastly, Light for the World recommended its Accessibility Checklist as a tool for those city managers and policymakers that wish to ensure an accessible city.

The following presentation focused on youth as another key group to include in decision-making and urban solutions, **Mr. Si-tou Wai-Kit presented the Asia-Pacific CITYPRENEURS: Urban Innovation Challenge.** The programme is led by the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific with multiple partner organizations. The presentation introduced the Citypreneurs programme overall and youth urban entrepreneurs. It aims to scale innovations from youth entrepreneurs that address inclusion locally and the programme itself aims to strengthen youth engagement in local decision-making. The presentation noted that as of 2019, the programme received 176 applications from 46 countries. It was also noted, with much interest, that the programme has $66,350,000 USD available for investment and has awarded

$18,000 USD in seed funding to youth entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs have provided technological solutions to increase access for persons with disabilities, through mobile applications, or to basic services at local level with water and sanitation innovations for example. "Citypreneurs is the only international start-up platform in the world that focuses on building the capacity of young entrpreneurs to offer revenue generating that solutions for urban challenges and to achieve the 2030 Agenda." To promote youth inclusion locally, the platform aims to bring together public-private collaborations and policy development to change the norms around youth inclusion in decision-making. The presentation also highlighted that there are biases and implicit cultural norms that create barriers for youth entrepreneurs to be engaged locally even if they have practical solutions. To tackle this the programme also has a "bias checker" on its website.[3] These traditional norms also provide the groundwork for the Citypreneurs programme to grow and ensure scale up of more youth innovations for the SDGs for youth solutions to be better recognized and included in local planning and decisionmaking.

Lastly, Mr. Albert Graves, Program Director of the World Smart Sustainable Cities Organization (WeGO) focused on "Leaving No One Behind in Smart Cities". The presentation noted the role of technology to strengthen inclusive planning and participatory governance with voices of all vulnerable groups. The intervention introduced how WeGo as a members-based organization provides global technical support for cities to become "SMART" and that these interventions contribute to inclusion. It was noted that "technology can be a great equalizer" if SMART city planning includes the most vulnerable groups. To address this need, WeGO also noted its Civic Participation System (CPS) and other innovations in smart transport, smart city master plans and more. The presentation noted any cases and methods that WeGO is implementing across member cities and countries to improve inclusion of vulnerable groups and cities that design public services around citizens, as "livable, lovable, nature-friendly and tech-savvy cities". The presentation noted that today 20,000 cities worldwide aim to become smart and sustainable cities. WeGo works with cities especially in Asia and Africa to also share service provider solutions for the inclusive public services cities wish to design, ensuring these are also in line with the SDGs. The presentation concluded noting that the solutions to accelerate and deliver on the SDGs and smart cities are there, but greater applied networking and technical cooperation is needed through long-term partnerships.

II. Conclusion

In conclusion, nearly 50 participants from diverse sectors attended the session with the question and answer session focusing on the tools and initiatives presented. City representatives asked about how to get involved into WeGO as an initiative and organization. Others discussed how to apply the Light for the World Accessibility Checklist in their cities. Still, others asked to know about the future sessions of the Citypreneurs programme and other upcoming events such as the UNOSD upcoming International Mayors Forum to be held in Incheon this .

---

[3] https://www.citypreneurs.org/diversity-inclusion

The event concluded with a reminder to participants that a culture of inclusion rests on breaking the social norms and biases that prevent engagement of vulnerable groups at the local level and participants were encouraged to call out these norms and ensure i) identify who vulnerable groups are at risk of being left behind with open and transparent data sharing on progress and programmes to address these groups in the coming decade, ii) identify the barriers for inclusion in planning and decision-making and how technologies can break these barriers, iii) ensure inclusively design cities and local services from the start, iv) ensure multi-stakeholder policy sounding boards and policy review councils in local government with diverse representation and v) consistently call out social norms and biases that prevent a culture of inclusion. The side event proposed these concluding outcomes for a focus on inclusion, universal access and more into the WUF10's outcome document consultation. These took the shape of the WUF10 Abu Dhabi Declared Actions, which included a strong focus on Leaving No One behind, a culture of inclusion and universal design principles as well.

The next session of the World Urban Forum (WUF11) in 2022 will be held in Katowice, Poland – the first time WUF has been held in Central Eastern Europe – and this will provide an opportunity for more follow up of how cities are ensuring no one is left behind.

III.   Additional resources shared

- WUF10 Abu Dhabi Declared Actions *(Updated as of 7 March 2020)*
- Light for the World Resource Book on Disability Inclusion *(Updated as of 7 March 2020)*
- Light for the World Accessibility Checklist *(Updated as of 19 February 2020)*
- UN Development and Disability Report *(Updated as of 19 February 2020)*

IV.   **For more information and final presentations please visit:** https://unosd.un.org/events/side-event-tenth-world-urban-forum-wuf10