

This paper contributes to the High-Level ministerial meeting on the International Framework for Sustainable Development – 19 – 21 July 2011, Solo, Indonesia

Promoting Sustainable Development at the National and Local Levels

An Advocacy Paper

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Network of Regional Governments
for Sustainable Development

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4. Promoting Sustainable Development Governance at the National and Local Levels

(i) Strategies to improve cross-sectoral coordination and coherence in implementation of the sustainable development agenda; and (ii) Enhancing the contribution of civil society to decision-making at national and local levels.

Subnational governments, thanks to their intermediate position between the national and local levels, are particularly well placed for identifying the needs and the strengths of their societies towards sustainable development. This is enhanced by the fact that they are often responsible for the elaboration and implementation of policy, legislation, programmes fiscal mechanisms and public investments plans in several areas - such as climate action, transport, energy, the environment, agriculture, forestry, industry, spatial planning, resource management, technology development and transfer, civil protection or development cooperation - that directly influence sustainable development goals.

Subnational governments are determined to address sustainable development matters hand in hand with the economic difficulties many of them are facing by turning these challenges into an opportunity to move towards greener, smarter and more inclusive societies. Convinced that their leadership and contribution is essential to help achieve the ultimate objectives of sustainable development; since Rio 1992 subnational governments and local authorities have implemented and developed intense initiatives that have facilitated the success of multiple sustainable development policies (such as Agenda 21, climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, nature and biodiversity conservation measures, public procurement strategies, development cooperation projects, etc.). They have also engaged in and contributed to international decision-making processes on sustainable development matters via the major group for 'local authorities.' The important lessons being learned at the subnational level can often feed into and improve national policy and shape more ambitious and innovative responses to sustainable development.

Subnational governments welcome the improvements achieved by the international community on sustainable development matters since Rio 1992, namely:

- The ratification of international agreements that establish long-term frameworks and bring in coordinated action at international level. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and subsequently the Kyoto Protocol, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Desertification, the Johannesburg Declaration or Agenda 21 are some examples on how environmental multilateralism has consequently driven to sustainable development legislation and policy at national but also at subnational level.
- A step forward has been taken with the introduction of sustainable development legislation and strategies at national and subnational levels. Strategic thinking in governments has facilitated the implementation of long-term initiatives.
- The level of public awareness on sustainable development and environmentally friendly behaviour has substantially increased. People and organisations know now what the issues are, what is at stake are and how they can influence the present and the future with their daily life. The closeness of subnational governments and local authorities to their societies has been and remains crucial in opening pathways for behavioural change.

However there are still **big challenges that should be tackled in order to improve progress and accelerate the pace towards global sustainability. Key to achieving these is cross-sectoral, coordinated and coherent implementation, based on multilevel governance. Initiatives suggested by subnational governments include:**

1. Full deployment of the potential offered by subnational governments and local authorities in their capacity as ‘governmental stakeholders’ complementary to national and international efforts.

Multilevel governance is crucial to design and implement a new development paradigm. The review of the International Environmental Governance and the Sustainable Development Governance should go beyond the discussions around existing institutions. The economic, social and environmental challenges we are facing are crying out for multilevel governance adapted to the modern times. True multilevel and multistakeholder Sustainable Development Governance will help turn the current and emerging sustainable development issues into opportunities. Such a positive interpretation generates hope and trust; and though it requires strong leadership, it is also in itself and enabler of leadership because it places the ownership of the process in all key stakeholders and levels of government.

Subnational governments call on national governments and international organisations to review the framework of the current Major Group for Local Authorities in order to reflect as well the crucial role of subnational governments and move towards the

establishment of new deeper formal partnerships based on the notion of 'governmental stakeholders'.

It is worth noting that, within the Rio Conventions, at their last meeting in October 2010 in Nagoya the parties of the UN Convention for Biological Diversity (UN CBD) adopted Decision X/22 endorsing the Plan of Action for Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities. The Decision invites Parties to involve subnational governments, cities and other local authorities when revising their national biodiversity strategies and action plans; and encourages subnational governments, cities and other local authorities and their networks to contribute to the implementation of the Plan of Action. Besides, the Plan of Action identifies as partnerships and coordination mechanisms the establishment of Advisory Committees of Cities and of Subnational Governments. The Cancun Agreements under the UN Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) achieved in December 2010 in Cancun, Mexico, recognise for the first time subnational governments and local authorities as key 'governmental stakeholders' in global climate change efforts (paragraph 7 of Decision 1/CP16).

Besides, at the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC26/GMEF) that took place February 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya, the President's summary of the meeting, as a contribution of UNEP to the preparatory process towards Rio +20, highlighted the urgent need of real reform of the current International Environmental Governance, as opposed to cosmetic reform; and stated that "local and regional authorities are critical in implementation of agreed national commitments" (paragraph 62 in combination with 45).

2. Incorporation of an explicit territorial dimension into the implementation tools and mechanisms of the different multilateral sustainable development agreements, coupled with sufficient resources for multilevel implementation.

3. Further encouragement of and adequate support to the elaboration of inter-ministerial and over-arching sustainable development strategies at national and subnational level, so as to enhance the equal and consistent integration of each of the 3 pillars of sustainable development into policy making.

4. Encouragement of 3-pillar sustainable development compliance for all relevant national and subnational policies.

5. Independent, cross-ministerial sustainable development commissions in each country, based on multistakeholder and multilevel governance membership would constitute an asset for the elaboration of inter-ministerial over-arching sustainable development strategies and for the sustainable development compliance of public policies; while they would help reduce other negative impacts of the fragmentation of Sustainable Development Governance at national level.

6. Development and implementation of **standard sustainability assessment methodologies** based on, for example, standard indicators and objectives, standard calculations of externalities, etc.

7. Further **research, academic work and political elaboration of the ‘beyond GDP’ approach, directly linked to defined targets, drivers, indicators and timelines.**

8. Enhancement of **3-pillar sustainable development compliance for initiatives and projects funded by UN entities.**

9. Incorporation of a **sustainable development ombudsman within the independent, cross-ministerial sustainable development commissions of each country** (outlined in point 5).

10. **Building upon the solid experience of subnational governments and local authorities on deep collaborative work with civil society sectors and business** during policy shaping and implementation processes. Since Rio 1992, in the process of elaborating Agenda 21 initiatives or sustainable development strategies and thanks to the closeness to their citizens and the knowledge of their territories, subnational governments have gathered substantial experience on how to establish consultation mechanisms and *fora*, while they have also encouraged the organisation of the so-called third sector in their societies.

Using the subnational and local levels to enhance the contribution of civil-society to the decision-making process on sustainable development has the advantage of accentuating in citizens the feeling of belonging to their community and empowering them to engage in the present and the future of the place they can directly relate to. All these aspects involve the **qualitative advantage of contributing to building resilient communities.**

10. **Support from the international and national levels to the identification of the parameters of resilient communities** at the subnational and local levels.

11. **Further use of sustainable and green public procurement, based on the long-track experience of subnational governments and local authorities on this front** and as a way to, not only lead to behavioural change, but also facilitate the market penetration of innovative sustainable development initiatives.

12. **Further encouragement of the introduction of sustainable development *cursus* into children education programmes from early age, as well as into a wide range of relevant professional and vocational training fields** (such as architects, builders, land planners, teachers, farmers, etc.).



The **Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development, nrg4SD** works tirelessly to champion the work of subnational governments on sustainable development, including climate action. As an International non-profit organisation representing subnational governments (namely federated states and regional governments) at the global level, nrg4SD promotes understanding, partnerships and projects in sustainable development and seeks greater international recognition of the important contribution of subnational governments towards sustainable development. A Member of the Organisations des Régions Unies-Forum Global d'Associations de Régions (ORU-FOGAR), nrg4SD is the voice of ORU-FOGAR in the field of sustainable development.

nrg4SD is an accredited observer with the UNFCCC as part of the constituency for Local Government and Municipal Authorities (LGMA).

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