PACT FOR THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY

UCLG
United Cities
and Local Governments

POLICY COUNCILS ◖◗ TOWNHALLS

FUTURE ENVISIONING EXERCISES

VISION DOCUMENT

Trust

Common Agenda

#LISTEN2CITIES
LOCALIZING THE SDG SUMMIT 2023

FUTURE ENVISIONING EXERCISES

The Future Envisioning Exercise on Trust made it clear that regaining or even building trust where none existed before, is necessary to achieve the new social contract and the expected governance's renewal. Both the Pact for the Future and the United Nations Secretary General's Common Agenda call for action to build trust. We must think of bold actions and alliances to build trust in a context of increasing polarization, the rise of extremism and the multiplication of communication bubbles.

Members and partners noted in the exercise that trust in governments, media or science and academia is falling. Some exposed the serious threats and even attacks suffered by local elected officials, journalists or academics like hate speech and even verbal and physical abuse.

To face this challenge and generate trust where it does not exist or reinforce it where it is fragile, various principles and actions were proposed. Proximity, transparency and co-creation are ways to build trust in the political arena, and quality journalism and scientific cooperation are also useful tools.

The exercise of participatory and deliberative democracy practices at the local level are good examples of how to face the recovery of trust and the renewal of governance, but we must not lose sight of the global perspective of challenges such as content moderation in large digital platforms or large media groups.

The present Vision Document compiles the aspirations and contributions shared by participants who attended the Future Envisioning Exercise; an analysis of how to shape local actions to achieve such aspirations so they effectively contribute to urban and territorial equality; as well as a set of policy orientations for doing so and a pool of useful resources.

1. **Shared understandings and aspirations for Trust as an entry point for unfolding the Pact for the Future**

● LRGs and their allies acknowledged that, in many territories, the issue was not so much rebuilding trust, but building it altogether. It was noted how in those territories in which there had been instances of trust, these make up valuable sources of inspiration. Likewise, participants noted how the Pact for the Future that LRGs are pushing forward together with civil society is meant to be a token of hope by demonstrating that other types of relationships between populations and their public institutions are possible.

● Yet, there was a shared understanding of the gravity and complexity of the current drivers of mistrust. The current spread of fake news, hate speech, and verbal and physical abuse, together with corruption, threaten open societies and democracy. People don't feel invited to participate or engage with governments' policymaking processes, while LRGs' face threats and abuse on a regular basis. We need to ensure safe environments for elected officials to enable them to take risks and foster institutional innovations that improve populations' engagement with public institutions.

- Participants agreed on the critical importance of building and rebuilding trust to advance urban and territorial equality, noting how, in particular for LRGs in their relation with youth and migrant youth from marginalized communities, critical challenges are how to create spaces for engagement that calm fear and allow to better understand different communities' needs.

- It was also agreed that it is necessary to advance feminist approaches to local governance, as these have proven to be particularly effective in ingraining elements that are central to build and maintain trust into local governance systems, such as freedom of speech, artistic expression or ensuring that all populations, including women and girls, have equal access to prosperity opportunities.

- The importance for the egalitarian application of the rule of law was also shared, as was the importance of meaningful participation in local decision making that places active citizens at the center of democratic governance. In this regard, participants shared the aspiration to effectively co-construct and implement policies that respond to the needs, expectations and ambitions of communities, as there was also a shared understanding that the way in which these are dealt with greatly impacts who populations trust.

Fig. 1. Results of the interactive consultation conducted using Mentimeter

2. Contributions shared for achieving these aspirations

Throughout the Future Envisioning Exercise, participants contributed their experiences, key questions, tools, and guiding principles to the collective reflection on how to achieve the aspirations mentioned above. This has allowed to identify certain key topics that need to be addressed to achieve the shared aspirations.

The conversation was framed by a discussion on the main drivers behind the current increased perception of generalized mistrust among citizens. Participants shared how they perceive there is a challenge to trust media, governments, or business, but also trust in a broader community.

The collective reflection then turned to the implications of trust-building as a foundation to **renewing the social contract** and constructing more just and inclusive **local democracy** processes. It was shared how trust between populations and their political leadership is a key indicator for the prospective success or failure of policies and programs. Moreover, trust was

singled out as being fundamental for the appropriate **management of crises and complex emergencies.** As put during the discussion: as long as there is trust, there will be cooperation, which is essential for the rapid and radical public interventions often needed to respond to crises and emergencies. While without trust, the rapid spread through social media of fake news and conspiracies generates confusion and uncertainty, which creates fear and paves the way for manipulation and hatred. This, in turn, can lead to violence such as that experienced short ago in South Africa or Paris. What are the actions that local governments, in alliance with civil society, can take to promote trust through education, culture and more open transparent institutions and community life based on human rights? How to engage actors who may not understand the political system or the topics that are on the table?

In order to advance these topics, participants shared different experiences and agreed on some underlying principles. It was highlighted how LRGs have a privileged position to build trust by being close to the people who are directly affected by local decisions. This proximity should be leveraged to trigger a virtuous policy learning cycle by incorporating populations' views on the decisions taken. The importance of building relationships towards building trust was also brought to the fore, as it allows to build a shared understanding of the problem(s) at hand, the context, and the human experience of the problem. The notion of connection, or reconnection, was also emphasized as a key pathway forward, by engaging with one another, co-creating solutions to shared problems and protecting the commons.

Participants agreed that by strengthening communication between local governments and citizens, citizen trust would be built more firmly. These efforts need to be part of **defining a new governance structure**, which also entails **redefining the role of communities, as having** active citizens at the center of democratic governance is an essential mechanism to safeguard trust in time. Participants stressed also how enacting clear and coherent policies and ensuring a consistent application of the rule of law and the certainty of sanctions needed to provide the foundation for trust-building efforts.

Participants also identified **people-centred policymaking** policies and actions as another key pathway to advance trust building. These include fostering feminism and care approaches to governing, since they contribute to ensuring freedom of speech, artistic expression, and equality of opportunities. As well as actions and policies striving for social inclusion, which allow for the co-construction of innovative solutions that take into account all the dynamics led by youth, women, communities, and migrants, and thus improves trust between elected officials and populations who may be disenfranchised from political processes. Two concrete successful experiences in building trust within the communities through citizen participation were shared. These experiences included the legislative theater in Glasgow (Scotland), useful tool through which young people raised their voices and built a new relationship with the council based on trust and involvement. As well as the experience with neighborhood assemblies that are functioning in Santa Fe (Argentina), and which represent the key actions for the building of cooperation between council officials and people to achieve the Pact for the Future. In all efforts, it was agreed how it is also necessary to improve accountability and have more transparency in the budget and its execution.

Reinforcing education in respect of democracy, political representatives, public servants and citizens was also highlighted as essential to trust-building efforts, as it entails the acceptance of difference and discrepancy, which is essential for the creation of community and the reduction of

inequalities. Open government was also highlighted as an instrument to improve the communications and understanding between governments and citizens and hence the implementation of policies and processes. Importantly, participants also delved into experiences with the use of new technologies to engage with population groups who do not traditionally engage with in-person forms of local policymaking processes. Along these lines, ensuring the inclusivity of the actions taken was also a key concern shared. The experience of Iztapalapa (Mexico) for instance, illustrated how both in-person and digital means of engaging with the different groups that make up the local population were necessary, in order to ensure that nobody is excluded from active efforts to regain trust.

3. Shared principles linking the vision with the municipalist movement's commitment to urban and territorial equality

The previous section compiles the contributions of participants to the collective conversation, which have allowed to identify several dimensions that are critical for building Trust as an entry point for a sustainable future. The following analysis contributes to the conversation about how local actions designed to address some of these critical topics could be shaped, for these actions to effectively advance urban and territorial equality, avoiding unwillingly reproducing inequalities.[1]

Key topic addressed during the FEE	How to ensure that local actions advanced to address this topic effectively lead to increased urban and territorial equality?
	● Adopting a rights-based approach to local democracy can ensure respect for the rights of all community members and promote transparency and inclusivity in decision-making processes, building trust of community members often not engaged with local decision-making processes.
Local democracy	● Addressing the spatial dimension of inequalities can help identify and address disparities in political representation and civic engagement across different areas of the local territory.
	● Promoting a new culture of subnational governance can foster a culture of open dialogue, collaboration, and citizen participation in local decision-making processes.
	● Adopting an adequate financing and investment architecture can help allocate resources to support civic education programs and ensure transparency in the use of public funds.
	● Engaging with time: past, present, and future can promote reflecting on historical challenges, involving young people in civic activities, and establishing mechanisms for continuous evaluation and adaptation of democratic processes.

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[1] This analysis is based on the findings of the 2022 GOLD VI report, the flagship publication of the organized constituency of LRGs, produced in partnership with Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality. The key notion is that for local actions of any kind to advance urban and territorial equality, they must be based on a set of principles, related to the notions of rights, space, governance, finance and time. The five principles in their entirety can be found here.

4. Policy orientations: Key takeaways

Based on the common aspirations and contributions shared, as well as on the reflection on how to ensure that local actions to achieve these aspirations effectively advance urban equality, the following policy orientations articulate the shared vision for rebuilding trust.

I. People-centered policymaking and participatory democracy

A key factor in rebuilding trust is the involvement of citizens in the decision-making processes of their cities. Cities are the institutions that are most directly connected to the people, and engaging citizens through programmes such as those presented in this session - citizens' assemblies or legislative theaters - has been shown not only to improve the relationship between citizens and officials, but also to create the bonds of trust and cooperation necessary to progress towards the goals set by the Pact for the Future and reduce the inequalities that exacerbate the dynamics of mistrust.

As it was diagnosed after the 21st Conference of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy in Grenoble, in the face of authoritarian and totalitarian tendencies that are detrimental to solving the problems that affect all citizens, we must respond with an even more open, even more local, even more participatory and even more direct democracy. It is necessary to shape democratizing as a pathway to equality by fostering an enabling environment for local democracy and decentralization; promoting transparency, accountability, open governance and the fight against corruption; taking an intersectional approach to participatory policy and programming and; promoting participatory processes to involve all residents in decision-making and local governance monitoring.

II. Strategic tools to consider cities as the perfect environment to build trust

UCLG, as network where local governments can share and obtain fruitful instruments to apply policies which provide the inclusion and participation of all their citizens as a process of regaining trust, must continue to reinforcing the message, providing innovative tools and considering all kind of perspectives to advance in the achievement of the Common Agenda and the goals of the Pact for the Future.

III. A feminist way of governing taking into account the social inclusion and a real dialogue with communities: the affective component of trust

The feminist governance reflects the insertion of feminist ideas into international power structures: as feminist ideas become embedded in global governance, feminism becomes immersed in power relations and participates in the formulation of legal technologies. Feminist projects thus move from occupying a position of marginalization and resistance to intervening in the creation of international normative regimes. The local governments must work to pursue that.

Women live in profoundly unequal cities, even more so in times of crisis. Violence, care and income insecurity are the most relevant issues in their lives. In the face of these situations, women organize themselves and devise strategies to sustain their own lives and those of their families and communities. Feminist urbanism puts gender inclusion and care as central to

everyday life, with the understanding that women's right to cities requires the recognition of care as the work and right of every person.

Women's proposals and demands must be systematized, and their knowledge, their potential and pending rights must also be taken into account in order to make progress in building more just and equitable cities for all. This approach must be intersectional and inclusive with all communities, taking into account the needs of those who, because of discrimination and accumulated fragility, are traditionally excluded from participatory democracy, in particular people with disabilities, displaced persons and the most disadvantaged with the participation of women, gender minorities and indigenous communities.

Only by preserving intersectional inclusion, we will be able to achieve the trust between local officials and citizens and, as presented in the session, this inclusion is affordable taking into account the affective component of trust. The bond of affection generated by a neighborhood that relates on a one-to-one basis with its local leader is key to the trust that citizens place in the political agenda and institutions.

IV. *Reinforcement of education in respect of democracy and its institutions: identify violence against local officials and activist and prevent it*

It is necessary to protect local elected officials from the threats and violence that are growing at the rate of democratic distrust

and anti-parliamentarianism. Totalitarian populisms' discourses generate major problems of mistrust as they exploit factors such as the misinformation, the lack of access to quality information for those sectors of the population with fewer opportunities, or the fear provoked by inequalities and socio-economic instability. We must reinforce the education of citizens on democracy. We believe that it takes a whole society to make democracy work. In urban planning, culture, the creation of laws, ecology, health, equal rights for women and men, when citizens are given the power, they often go further and faster than politicians by themselves.

V. *The work of local leaders, academics and journalists on regaining trust: rethinking journalism and media to maintain an independent information of quality.*

As we have noticed, the need to maintain the people well informed, identify violence against local officials and prevent it, requires reinforcing the spread of quality information and education on democracy. The only way to preserve quality information and avoid fake-news that cause social confusion and generate mistrust is to reinforce the independence of free and quality journalism, as well as to review the way information is disseminated through social media and the impact of new technologies in the perception of information, as is the case with artificial intelligence. Trust is an everyday endeavor. It must be rational and has a very important affective component that is palpable in local governments.

5. Pool of resources

Title
[Bra. The Politician's Safety Survey 2021](#)
[Open Government Partnership - Local website](#)
[SALAR's article: "Threats and violence against elected politicians", 2023](#)
[UCLG (2022). The Pact for the Future of Humanity](#)
[UCLG International Observatory of Participatory Democracy. Award Best Practice in Citizen Participation 2022: Legislative Theatre for Greater Manchester Homelessness Prevention Strategy](#)
[UCLG Town Halls (2022). "Trust and Government Policy Paper"](#)
[UCLG, KNOW (2022). GOLD VI. *Pathways to urban and territorial equality: Addressing inequalities through local transformation strategies.*](#)
[UN (2022). Secretary-General's Report on "Our Common Agenda"](#)