

POLICY COUNCILS   TOWNHALLS

# FUTURE ENVISIONING EXERCISES

BRIEFING NOTE

*Reclaiming the Commons*

## FUTURE ENVISIONING EXERCISES

The Future Envisioning Exercises, mandated by the UCLG Policy Councils, are a mechanism to **unfold the Pact for the Future**. They are the common point of arrival of the present Policy Councils and Town Halls, building up on the outputs and outcomes of both processes, the UCLG World Congress and the 2023 Retreat. While, simultaneously, they are **a common point of departure**: they are a space of dialogue and co-creation in which the UCLG political leadership, together with organized civil society and partners articulated in the UCLG Town Halls, will aim to reach real and tangible conclusions through forward-looking consultations around 4 Entry Points to unfold the Pact for the Future: **Reclaiming the Commons, Redefining Finances, Regaining Trust** and **Rebuilding Governance Architecture**.

The conclusions reached will inform the deliberations of UCLG's statutory bodies, thus contributing to the political mandate of the Pact and the roadmap of our world organization. These deliberations will also inform how the Pact for the Future contributes to the UN General Assembly's revision of the 2030 Agenda at the SDG Summit, as well as to the 2024 Summit of the Future, which will build on and contribute to the Secretary General's "Our Common Agenda".

### 1. SETTING THE SCENE



In an era of global and interconnected crises, growing inequalities and rampant distrust, governments at all levels face the urgent need to rebuild their relationship with the communities, with nature and among themselves. As reminded by Lorena Zárata, founder and member of the support team of the Global Platform from the Right to the City, at the kick-start session of this collective thinking process:

*"We need a new social contract based on care and solidarity of redistribution. A social contract that includes the whole of society, starting with those traditionally excluded, who are claiming a radical change in the rules of the game. We know the whys and the what, so the question is how, who, where, when, with whom and with which resources. The Commons, and Commoning, are part of the answer too. Because Commons are not just things, but are the social relations that produce, protect and foster those things. They are not just any relations, but transformative social relations that can bring about the changes that we need."*

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed us to reaffirm that "public is back". Despite this, the advance of environmental degradation, together with global trends that oppress, segregate and hurt our communities (informality, housing prices, precarious working conditions, access barriers, structural racism and an array of inequalities embedded in our institutions), confront us with the structural reflection that permeates the Pact for the Future: it is no longer just a matter of expanding the public, but of restructuring it.

The United Nations understands the Global Commons as the High Seas, the Atmosphere, Antarctica and Outer Space. This Future Envisioning Exercise will expand this notion and apply **commoning strategies to a wide variety of policies that are of direct concern to local and regional administrations**. From housing, public services or food, to public spaces, culture or the internet, urban Commons play a critical role in fostering community engagement and exploring renewed governance options beyond the private/public divide.

As stated in the **Pact for the Future**, our constituency is committed to **"genuinely seek equity and opportunity for all and to foster a new narrative that reflects these values. This means forging new development paradigms that protect the local and global commons, measuring progress through the lives of the poor, excluded and vulnerable populations, and not the rich and privileged. It also means changing our systems - from degenerative to regenerative, and from**

**divisive to distributive – by design.”**

As defined by the UCLG Town Halls, the commons are “material and immaterial good resources, services and social practices. They are considered fundamental for the reproduction of life. Thus they cannot be commodified but have to be taken care of and managed in a collective way, under democratic principles of direct participation, radical inclusion and intersectional equity and justice.” This diverse set of practices, processes, forms of knowledge and spaces share some key features:

- **Communities** of commoners committed to overcome social divisions and inequalities.
- A common pool of **resources**, which are not commodified.
- A set of shared **principles**, agreements and practices.

The public and the common often go hand in hand, but they are not the same. Our constituency and its allies have been reflecting for years on the fit between these two issues and between them and the broader notion of the Right to the City. As our Town Hall and GOLD VI remind us, the Commons are not just about public goods, basic services, tangible realities. They are also immaterial realities, processes, memories and expectations. So what distinguishes the commons in our territories? **The commons are not only public or private; they belong to, they are the fruit of, communities.**

And who are the communities? **The notion of community expands and democratizes the concept of citizenship beyond the legal status and conditions of existence of the people who inhabit the territories.** In this sense, the Town Halls remind us that many of the most substantial experiences around the Commons are linked to the struggles of marginalized groups, that include but are not limited to indigenous peoples, black and racialized communities, migrants and refugees, grassroots women and community organizers, LGBTQIA+ people, children and youth, people with disabilities and older persons, campesines and rural communities, fiercely defending their lands, forests and waters against powerful corporate actors and corrupt regimes.

**Speaking of the commons is to speak of local democracy, trust, care, equity, co-creation and accountability.** Regulating the Commons is necessary to protect them, but it requires solid resources, actors and principles that embrace and promote the needs, aspirations, memories and material conditions of all territories and their inhabitants. This includes people and ecosystems, nature and culture.

And if the commons concern us all, why are they especially relevant for local and regional governments? Because **the Commons are closely linked to the notion of proximity**. As the level of government closest to people, ecosystems and ancestral practices and knowledge that coexist with innovative and pragmatic responses to new realities, local and regional governments are in a key place to listen, connect, facilitate and promote co-creation processes that protect and expand the commons through mutual trust. Only from this new understanding and practice of the Commons can the economy and governance system be transformed to meet the needs of all of us and the planet we inhabit, leaving no one and no place behind.

The **Right to the City** framework provides concrete guidelines to engage in transformative commoning initiatives. Both fundamental principles and strategies are encompassed around 8 main components:

- non discrimination;
- gender equality;
- inclusive citizenship (detached from nationality and legal status);
- enhanced political participation;
- social functions of property and collectively defined public-community interest;
- equity in the use of quality and safer public spaces and services; diverse and inclusive economies (including informal and social and solidarity economies);
- and more just and balanced urban-rural linkages.

## 2. KEY FACTS AND CHALLENGES

The local and regional spheres lend themselves as a particularly fertile ground for the flourishing of collective management of common goods through public communities partnerships. This can be accounted for several reasons, starting with the degree of proximity that such levels of government have with communities and residents.

This is of key importance to create more diverse and effective channels for inclusion and participation of communities that are historically marginalized and experience under-representation and exclusion at, such as women, children and youth, racialized populations, migrants and refugees, LGBTQIA+ populations; indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and older persons.

Commoning strategies can address **unequal access to housing** and land:



- 1 billion people globally lived in informal settlements in 2020, accounting for 56% of the urban population in Sub-Saharan Africa
- Data available from 52 countries for 2019-2021 reveal that about 46% of legal frameworks offer limited protection of women's land rights, nearly 25% offer medium levels of protection and only 29% offer good protection.

The **financialization and precarization** of tenure security puts growing parts of the population in vulnerable situations:

- 2 million people are forcibly evicted each year, as estimated by UN agencies in the 2000s. However, no global data on forced evictions are systematically collected.
- Global Real Estate is valued at more than double global GDP. Global real estate represents nearly 60% of the value of all global assets (217tn USD), with residential real estate comprising 75% (163tn USD) of the market .

Unequal **access to basic services and public space** prevent large parts of the population from enjoying the right to the city:

- In 2020, 26% of the world population lacked safety managed water services, 48% of the world population lacked safety managed sanitation and 30% of the world population lacked a basic hand washing facility.
- 70% of Sub-Saharan Africa lacks safely managed drinking water services.
- Informal waste collection accounts for 50% to 100% of total waste collection in the urban areas of economically developing countries.
- In 2020, only about 45% of the global urban population had convenient access to green areas (400 meters of walking distance)

**Social geographies of exclusion** at international level have strong impacts at local level that fracture the right to the city:

- Nationals from countries with very high levels of human development can travel visa-free to around 85 per cent of all other countries worldwide. However, the visa restrictions in place for countries with very low levels of human development indicate that regular migration pathways are problematic for citizens. Irregular pathways are likely to be the most realistic (if not the only) option open to potential migrants from these countries.
- The increase in unemployment disproportionately affects migrant workers in those sectors significantly affected by the economic crisis, such as construction, tourism and domestic work. With no regular employment and little income, migrants are less likely to afford to pay rent or mortgages. They are thus at risk of defaulting and becoming homeless.

There are and there will be tensions and unexpected consequences and critical limitations, including the **manufactured polarization** and the

growing powers of international corporations, but also our own social and institutional skills to manage the commons.

A stronger public sector is needed that is able to work with the community in an approach that is not just participation, but co-creation:

- The **inseparable link between commons and public services** is not widely acknowledged. Its centralizing potential needs stronger cooperation with partners and other constituencies around the right to the city and localization.
- Commons should not be regulated in the same way that collaborations with private actors are. In this sense, relying on an ad hoc, **participatory and gradual approach** for regulation needs trust, resources and political will.

### 3. GENERAL GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are the new essentials, rights and public services that our collective must protect, strengthen and promote in alliance with the whole of society?
- What existing spaces and mechanisms can help us renew and expand the notion of the commons as key to guaranteeing the effective implementation of the Right to the City?
- What support and transformations should we demand from the international system to ensure that the multilateralism of the future enables the success of our shared strategy?

### 4. AGENDA

#### SETTING THE SCENE

*By UCLG World Secretariat*

## INTERACTIVE CONSULTATION

By UCLG World Secretariat

## ENTRY POINT

*The transformative power of the Commons for a sustainable future*

by **Aromar Revi**, UBUNTU Advisor of UCLG

*Water as a common good: sustainability and human rights at the core of public service delivery*

by **Rodrigo Mundaca**, Governor of Valparaíso

## CONTRIBUTIONS

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## IN FOCUS

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## AGORA

Facilitated by **Lorena Zárate**, Global Platform for the Right to the City



## 5. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- UCLG, KNOW (2022). 04 Commoning. *Pathways to urban and territorial equality: Addressing inequalities through local transformation strategies*. GOLD VI. <https://www.goldvi.uclg.org/en/commoning>
- UCLG Town Halls (2022). “(Global) Commons Policy Paper”. [https://decidim-uclg.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/decidim/attachment/file/4289/TH\\_PP\\_GlobalCommons.pdf](https://decidim-uclg.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/decidim/attachment/file/4289/TH_PP_GlobalCommons.pdf)
- UCLG (2022). The Lampedusa Charter for Dignified Human Mobility and Territorial Solidarity. [https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/lampedusa-\\_carta-eng.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/lampedusa-_carta-eng.pdf)
- UCLG Caring Systems Documentary (2022). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwMKnINUxJM>
- UCLG 2023. “Towards Caring Territories for Women Victims of Violence” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvwhNS5TZqk>