

10th World Water Forum Statement – Local and regional governments

**17 April 2024
15:00-16:30**

1. Human activities have disrupted the global cycle of water and biodiversity, endangering every individual, ecosystem, and community, with vulnerable populations, especially women and girls, persons with disabilities and older persons, bearing the greatest burden. The commodification of water and biodiversity exacerbates inequalities and threatens the fundamental human right to access clean water as it can lead to price hikes, exclusion of marginalized communities, and prioritization of profit over people's basic needs. This approach undermines social justice, perpetuates socio-economic disparities and poses a significant threat to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including food and health security, poverty alleviation, and global peace.
2. Despite the wealth of scientific knowledge and some progress made, political attention to this pressing issue remains inadequate. Therefore, advocating for a territorial approach based on public services and renewed private/public partnerships to water management and fostering enhanced cooperation among subnational entities are imperative steps forward. The urgency of the situation demands swift action to establish coordinated water and biodiversity governance mechanisms and bolster commitments to ensuring universal access to clean water and sanitation.
3. Shifting from a predominantly economic and technical stance to a political vision where water is considered as a common good offers an opportunity to reframe governance models and approaches, moving beyond narrow sectoral perspectives and recognizing water as a global political and cross-cutting issue intersecting with various policy domains, including health, economy, and diplomacy. This demands collective accountability and action to guarantee fair access for all inhabitants and counteract the commodification of water.
4. When administered as a public utility, water services prioritize the needs of communities over profit margins, aiming to deliver clean and affordable water to all citizens. Local governments, being closer to the needs of their inhabitants can be as frontline implementers of transformative measures aimed at securing equitable access to water and biodiversity, mitigating scarcity, and building resilience within communities tailored to local conditions and demands. This approach fosters transparency, accountability, and democratic control over water resources, safeguarding them for present and future generations.
5. Local and regional governments have emerged as key actors in implementing transformative actions to safeguard communities, in spite of these challenges. At the local level, they can oversee infrastructure development, enact regulations, implement affordability measures, provide emergency responses and ensure quality controls, all while engaging in dialogue local communities. On a global scale, they

can actively participate in multilateral and international forums through initiatives such as city diplomacy, decentralized cooperation, and regional cooperation in basin water management. These avenues have proven instrumental in streamlining the provision of vital water services, particularly during times of crisis, emphasizing the significance of solidarity and collaboration among stakeholders.

6. In urban areas, growing populations strain water infrastructure, leading to supply shortages and pollution risks. Urban local governments must balance equitable access with aging infrastructure and development pressures. Meanwhile, rural towns and regions contend with unique challenges like decentralized water sources, agricultural strain on resources as well as water quality and sustainability. In both contexts, climate change exacerbates these issues, with erratic weather patterns and extreme events complicating water management and requiring adaptive strategies for resilience.
7. To achieve SDG6 and other water-related goals, a reinvigorated multilateral system inclusive of all stakeholders is indispensable. Financial support and capacity building for local and regional governments are crucial components of this effort, as is a comprehensive approach to addressing inequality, climate change, and conflicts related to water resources.
8. Our commitment as local and regional governments to transforming the multilateral system through collective action is unwavering. This renewed approach must account for those complexities of urban and rural dynamics and provide support for building resilience and fostering peace, with the UN Summit for the Future and the World Social Summit as key milestones.
9. It is imperative to construct an environment that ensures the core services essential for our communities to thrive. This necessitates assertive support from national governments, international donors, and exchanges of experiences among local governments. Protecting water as a public good, human right, and essential public service requires a concerted effort. We must ensure that the conditions for an acceleration of the localization of Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6) to promote local and regional ownership and advance the 2030 Agenda.
10. In this sense, the constituency of local and regional governments calls on the stakeholders and member states to:

Rethink the Value of Water and biodiversity as a Global Common Good and Human Right

11. The Water Action Decade and the UN Water Action Agenda present a crucial opportunity to restore the global water cycle and advance SDG implementation, climate action, and biodiversity conservation. Its success will bring tangible benefits to communities, environments, and nations worldwide, thereby rebuilding trust in the multilateral system.
12. To achieve a sustainable, just, and fair water future we need to reevaluate the value of water and systematically integrating it into decision-making processes, promoting efficient use across sectors, equitable distribution among populations, and

sustainable practices at local and global levels. Our shared goal is to reclaim, protect, and uphold the rights associated with water, including the universal right to water for all. Market fluctuations should not determine the availability of basic rights and dignity; instead, all communities must take responsibility for their preservation. Achieving this requires inclusive governance, where every individual collaborates and works together. By redefining water as a common resource we can prioritize the needs of communities and rethink governance structures, thereby curbing excessive privatization, monopolization, and overexploitation resulting from its commodification.

- **Affirm the status of water and biodiversity as a global common good**, emphasizing the need for its continued recognition as a public service, co-led with local communities. This involves actions such as pursuing fair water management, in some cases like remunicipalization, deprivatization, renegotiating with private entities - especially multinational corporations - in public-private partnerships, or enhancing public management through participatory governance, thereby foregrounding commoning practices.
- **Build upon the display of care provided by local and regional governments** over the past years and recognize care as the dimension that needs to be incorporated into any and all policy decisions to protect the most vulnerable, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons, and those living in informality.
- **Promote gender inclusivity in water management** by fostering and enabling an environment that supports the active participation of all women and girls in decision-making processes and leadership roles. Encouraging accessible, participatory and inclusive approaches ensures that diverse voices are heard and considered in shaping water-related policies and initiatives.
- **Address the misuse of water as a tool of conflict** making visible the impacts on local territories and communities, fostering international solidarity and strengthening international criminal law to hold perpetrators accountable for war crimes or crimes against humanity related to water resources. This entails reinforcing advocacy campaigns and legal mechanisms to deter and punish acts where water is weaponized or targeted during conflicts.
- **Local governments are also instrumental to prioritize public engagement in redefining water as a common good.** By involving citizens in decision-making through mechanisms like public consultations, management models and community forums, authorities ensure that water policies align with community needs. Education campaigns on water conservation and pollution prevention empower individuals to be stewards of their resources.

Universal Access to Water and Sanitation

13. Strengthening local and regional public service provision of water and sanitation and ensuring the right to equitably access safe drinking water and sanitation has become urgent. Local and regional governments play a crucial role in safeguarding their communities. Over the past years, they have worked the continuity of basic services

by ensuring the provision of water, safeguarding the human rights of all communities to access potable water and clean sanitation, as well as agricultural, energy, and industrial policies.

14. Efforts led by local communities, with support from regional authorities, are pivotal in ensuring equitable access to water resources. Non-discriminatory access to water, particularly during heatwaves, contributes to the inclusivity, liveability, and resilience of cities. Local and regional governments have a privileged position to acknowledge the role of communities and the urban commons, facilitating access to and management of water for communities and scaling up commoning practices to ensure it is available to all.
15. To ensure the right to quality water and sanitation for all individuals, it is necessary to strengthen cooperation among stakeholders, promote partnerships between the public and private sectors, and limit speculative investments, with particular attention to disparities in quality and provision observed in peripheral areas of metropolitan areas. For water to be considered a right and a public good, it is essential to overcome its commodification, ensuring that it is available to all residents. Addressing its supply includes actions ranging from remunicipalization and deprivatization to improving public and/or private management through participatory governance, and even emphasizing cooperative practices while maintaining public ownership of the service.
16. In that regard, local and regional governments have a privileged position to provide transparent, efficient, accessible and inclusive management of water and sanitation services and to create enabling environments for exchange and learning to empower their communities.
 - **Accelerate the realization of the universal right** to access safe drinking water and sanitation by advocating for continuous governmental support at all levels. This entails enacting appropriate legislative frameworks and mobilizing all stakeholders through integrated and inclusive strategies to ensure a fair distribution of accessible water resources.
 - **Ensure equitable access to water and sanitation services for all people and tackle inequalities in clean water systems through human rights-based approach policies**, with a particular focus on vulnerable populations such as women, migrants, homeless individuals, and others vulnerable in society who are often more affected by contaminated water as well as territorial asymmetries. This requires ongoing support from all levels of government, addressing unequal access, especially in countries with advanced infrastructure but persistent pockets of deprivation.
 - **Develop participatory policy-making** as a crucial step towards implementing integrated management plans to ensure that public policies promote water and sanitation as a human right.
 - **Guarantee universal access through strong management in the public sector by deploying** groundwater management and monitoring solutions, including nature-based ones. Reinforce coordination, harmonization, data-

sharing, and scientific cooperation between neighboring states and regions, for both surface water and groundwater management.

Promoting Cooperation and Diplomacy

17. Water can create peace or spark conflict. When water is scarce or polluted, or when people have unequal or no access, tensions can rise. Access to drinking water is a human right. There is an urgent need to work together to protect and conserve our most precious resource to protect the wetlands and biodiversity. Cooperation on water paves the way for cooperation on all shared challenges. We must use water as a tool to create a more peaceful and prosperous world for all. Such cooperation is essential not only for promoting peace but also for preventing conflicts that may arise due to water-related disputes.
18. Local and regional governments, along with their networks and partners, play a crucial role in maintaining local service provision and fostering cooperation on water through city and subnational diplomacy and regional basin management. Efforts shared among them are critical for reaching shared objectives. These governments also facilitate decentralized cooperation and regional knowledge-sharing and capacity-building hubs among cities and regions to share, replicate, and continuously improve best practices.
 - **Promote dialogue and coordination for dispute resolution in water issues** by advocating for prioritizing water issues in bilateral and multilateral cooperation efforts, emphasizing sub-regional, regional, and international collaboration.
 - **Strengthen basin organizations** to support inclusive, sustainable, and integrated water resources management while enhancing cooperation in managing transboundary basins by fostering partnerships and exchanging information, experiences, and best practices.
 - **Highlight the role of city diplomacy** and regional basin management, recognizing the transformative role of city diplomacy, paradiplomacy, and regional basin management in water governance, emphasizing decentralized cooperation to enhance peace, solidarity, and knowledge exchange in water systems and resilience-building efforts.

Renewed Governance Frameworks for Cooperative Water Management

19. In today's world, numerous countries and communities are confronting the daunting challenges of water scarcity and related issues. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort involving the sharing of knowledge, technologies, and best practices to build more resilient and sustainable water systems. Additionally, international cooperation plays a pivotal role in tackling transboundary water issues and enhancing the effective management of shared water resources.
20. To achieve these objectives, it is imperative to establish renewed governance frameworks for cooperative water management. This necessitates collaboration

across all levels of government, along with the active involvement of key stakeholders and communities. Addressing the underlying causes of water and sanitation inequality, such as inadequate infrastructure and insufficient resources, is paramount. Moreover, fostering cross-border cooperation and collaboration at regional and local levels is vital to ensure equitable access to water resources for all. Effective cooperation in water management demands a higher level of political will to promote sustainable and integrated water resources management.

- **Emphasize the critical role of multi-level governance** and multi-stakeholder collaboration in managing water ecosystems. Ensure comprehensive governance by including cities, regions, and territories in water-related policymaking.
- **Renew collaboration with the private sector** to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6. Focus on innovation and new financing mechanisms in water and sanitation.
- **Raise community awareness** about water management and involve them in decision-making processes to ensure their needs and perspectives are considered.
- **Promote knowledge dialogue on water culture** by rescuing and valuing local and ancestral knowledge and practices in accordance with the human right to water.
- **Strengthen the capacity of Small Island Developing States (SIDS)** and their cities to respond to global challenges related to ocean degradation and its impact on water governance.

Protecting water ecosystems and biodiversity

21. Protecting water ecosystems and biodiversity is essential for ensuring the resilience of cities and the sustainability of life below water. Aquatic ecosystems are intricately linked with terrestrial and marine ecosystems, forming a continuum crucial for supporting diverse species. However, these ecosystems are under immense pressure from climate change, with wetlands particularly vulnerable due to diminishing terrestrial water supply and rising sea levels.
22. To achieve a more sustainable life below water, holistic strategies are imperative, considering the interconnectedness of urban and rural areas. These strategies should encompass solid waste management, sustainable agriculture, and addressing public health water-related issues. Resolving unsustainable resource use, population growth, inequality, and flawed economic systems is paramount for transitioning towards a regenerative future. This transition necessitates structural changes in economic models, production and consumption systems, and climate change adaptation and mitigation plans, with a focus on environmental rights and equity.
23. Local and regional governments play a pivotal role in realizing this vision, serving as frontline actors in water biodiversity management and ecosystem protection.

- **Adopt sustainable and integrated management plans** to preserve water resources and ecosystems, promoting resilience to climate change and demographic pressures. Simultaneously, raise awareness about water-related issues to encourage shifts towards more sustainable production and consumption practices.
- **Enhance protection of wetlands and traditional water systems**, promote recycling, and reuse of treated wastewater to further conservation efforts.
- **Strengthen capacities of local and regional governments** to implement sustainable management models for ecosystems and biodiversity, including collecting best practices on sustainable management of water ecosystems. Develop and implement policies to address groundwater pollution at national, river basin, and aquifer scales, allocating resources and implementation mechanisms to local governments for effective application, ensuring resource availability.
- **Develop an integrated and comprehensive approach** at all levels of government, incorporating water and sanitation as core components. This approach should also include related topics such as solid waste management, agriculture, and environmental health. Encourage stakeholders to consider a prevention approach at the source of pollution.
- **Promote bioeconomy programs based on the efficient and sustainable use of water resources**, advocating for the development of ecological, social, and solidarity-based economies that aim to conserve local ecosystems in cities and regions.
- **Create an enabling environment for local and regional governments** to provide efficient, user-centered essential services, including safe water production, supply, and sanitation. Facilitate collaboration between local and regional governments and communities/stakeholders to define common actions for protecting coastal and marine ecosystems, preserving the rights of future generations for a healthy planet.
- **Mobilise GIS mapping at a territorial level to identify regions and their inhabitants suffering from and at the risk of drought, land erosion, inundations and other water-related disasters** to mitigate, and boost preparedness and to help plan in advance to rehabilitate communities.
- **Integrate water footprinting** – as an environmental indicator of water consumption – with social, economic, and water governance dimensions, to support decision-making in water policies.

Financing for Water Infrastructure

24. In many cases, marginalized communities, such as indigenous peoples and rural populations, are disproportionately affected by water scarcity and lack of access to adequate sanitation facilities. Addressing these disparities will require significant investments in infrastructure, technologies, and capacity building, including in local

finance, as well as policies and programs that prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations.

25. Providing access to water and sanitation requires significant investments in infrastructure, education, and governance. Many governments and aid organizations are unable or unwilling to allocate sufficient resources to address this issue, which can perpetuate inequalities and exacerbate conflicts over water resources.

- **Mobilize adequate public financial resources** and development partnerships to invest in inclusive and accessible water and sanitation infrastructures. Develop "blue" and "green" jobs, particularly targeting young people, women, persons with disabilities and rural communities.
- **Advocate for development banks and central banks to provide direct financing** for "Climate-Biodiversity" projects of cities and local and regional governments. Ensure accessibility by allowing bidding in all official languages of the United Nations and including sign languages. In a similar vein, accessibility and mandate to directly manage loss and damage funding to climate-vulnerable Global South countries should also trickle down to local and regional governments who implement climate mitigation and adaptation projects in their territories.
- **Increase funding from climate donors for cities and local/regional governments** to implement actions addressing climate-related challenges, including better reception and integration conditions for climate induced migrants and displaced persons, and reducing climate risks associated with population displacement in urban areas, as well as the high risk in the guarantee of water supply and competition between all types of uses.
- **Strengthen the Loss and Damage initiative** proposed at the recent CoP28, with a specific focus on building resilience to water-related challenges.
- **Develop innovative financial solidarity mechanisms** at local and regional levels. Rethink fiscal architecture to strengthen local and regional finance, providing sufficient financial capacity to achieve Sustainable Development Goal targets. Prioritize financing for water savings at national, regional, and local levels, with a focus on areas facing significant quantitative pressure.
- **Sustainable water management is essential to secure a favorable and equitable future for all people.** Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge our responsibilities in the protection and conservation of water to ensure the development of future generations.