

POLICY COUNCILS  TOWNHALLS

# FUTURE ENVISIONING EXERCISES

THE OUTLOOK

## THE FUTURE ENVISIONING EXERCISES: UNFOLDING THE UCLG PACT FOR THE FUTURE

The UN Secretary General's Our Common Agenda calls for inclusive, networked, and effective multilateralism to “deliver for the people and planet” as a response to the current planetary context: marked by compounding complex emergencies and regressions in the achievement of the Global Goals. **The UCLG Pact for the Future - Daejeon Political Declaration, adopted at the World Congress in 2022, is the instrument through which the municipalist movement reinstates its commitment to this transformation.** It puts forward collective action, empowerment, shared ownership and solidarity.

**In 2023, UCLG set itself to unfolding the UCLG Pact for the Future, and the Future Envisioning Exercises (FEEs), mandated by the UCLG Policy Councils, are a mechanism to do so.** The FEEs are a space of dialogue and co-creation between the UCLG political leadership, organized civil society and partners articulated in the UCLG Town Halls. Between May and October 2023, the FEEs have allowed to advance forward-looking conversations around four topics that were identified as “entry points” to unfold the UCLG Pact for the Future - Daejeon Political Declaration: **Reclaiming the Commons, Redefining Finances, Regaining Trust and Rebuilding Governance Architecture.**

**The outcomes of the FEEs held around the four entry points have contributed to collectively setting the agendas of the renewed UCLG Policy Councils.** Each FEE provided space to hold interactive consultations with participants;

- local and regional governments (LRGs) shared their contributions, including their aspirations, experiences and challenges;
- “in-focus” segments allowed partners from civil society organizations or the UN system to challenge the terms of the conversation; and
- open discussions between all parties were promoted in an “Agora” format.
- On the basis of these discussions, each FEE led to identifying key policy orientations to take away.<sup>1</sup>

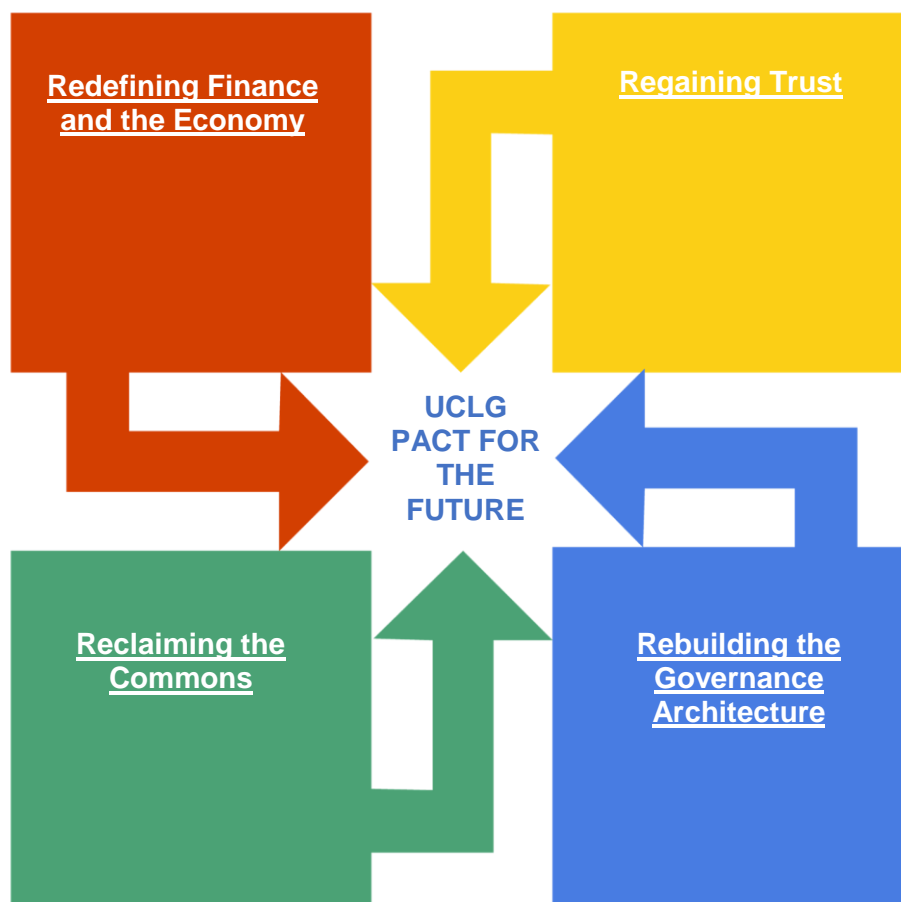
**The present Outlook provides a one-stop shop to the FEEs:** it centralizes all resources produced around the FEEs, and recaps the main policy orientations from each FEE, outlining their connection with the upcoming work of the UCLG Policy Councils and contributing to outline the common ways forward.

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<sup>1</sup> All the contributions exchanged and the policy orientations that emerged from each FEE can be consulted in the four Vision Documents published after the FEEs on the [UCLGMeets platform](#).

## The Future Envisioning Exercises in figures<sup>2</sup>

- Participants exchanged 104 facts, aspirations, ambitions and provocations in relation to Reclaiming the Commons, Regaining Trust, Redefining Finance and the Economy and Rebuilding the Governance Architecture.
- They exchanged 38 examples of high-impact partnerships, tools and bold actions through which they were advancing their commitments with renewing the social contract, leveraging collective organization and cooperation, defining new governance models, transforming the economic system, advancing local and territorial equality and promoting people-centered policymaking.
- Importantly, participants also identified 28 key questions to continue advancing jointly towards fulfilling such commitments.
- As well as 46 key takeaways and principles to guide the joint ways forward.
- And exchanged a wealth of resources, all pooled into a Mural, which can be accessed by clicking below:



<sup>2</sup> The following figures stem from the extensive analysis of all inputs and contributions exchanged in the Future Envisioning Exercises.

## At a glance: the key takeaways of the Future Envisioning Exercises and their connection with the UCLG Policy Councils

### What does Reclaiming the Commons entail?

The organized constituency shared a common aspiration to "Reclaim the Commons" as a powerful call to transform not just our understanding of resources, but also our very way of coexisting and thriving as communities.<sup>3</sup> We have committed to redefine the commons in both practical and conceptual terms. To do so, we must broaden our conception of the commons, shifting away from a view of resources to one of shared necessities and practices that sustain life. This shift requires us to change how we govern, finance, and fundamentally, what we mean by the commons.

#### Redefining Our Approach: Expanding the Notion of Commons

Commons are not just things. We need to think of time and place as commons. Just as we can choose to compete over time and resources, we can opt to care, share, and imagine a future in which we collectively thrive.

- The concept of the Right to the City and the new essentials, which are core to the **Policy Council on Reclaiming the Commons**, offer us a powerful lens to question the notions of place and services as commons, transcending the idea of private property and exploring the deeper meanings of place in culture, knowledge, and our imagination.
- To truly reclaim the commons, we must extend our gaze to the global financial system and the environment, breaking free from the colonial idea that elements like water and land are mere commodities for exploitation. The **Policy Council on Redefining Finance and Economies of Equality** will be instrumental to advance this conversation.

#### Defending Intrinsic Rights as part of the Right to the City

Reclaiming the commons is a mission intertwined with the defence of intrinsic rights. These rights, embedded in the commons and the communities that nurture them, include the right to water, the right to food, and the right to a healthy life. Symbolic, heritage and cultural spaces where local knowledge and memory flow across generations also fall within this purview.

- We recognize our responsibility to the next generations, striving for a diverse, inclusive, and accessible world where every young person can reach their potential. These universal rights and dignity must not be subject to the whims of

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<sup>3</sup> Click here to access the full [Vision Document on Reclaiming the Commons](#) for an extensive account of the discussions held in the FEE.

market forces. It's a task for all communities, where governance must rest on the shoulders of the people, working in unison. The intertwined work of the **Policy Councils on *Regaining Trust and Reclaiming the Commons*** will be core to this endeavor.

### A Holistic Approach to Governance

To make this vision a reality, we understand that a renewed social contract is imperative. It's not just a matter of tweaking existing institutions but a complete reframing of our governance architecture.

- This transformation transcends institutions; it's about how we relate to each other, to the planet, and how we govern ourselves. It is also about how the conversation is articulated globally. To this end, the **Policy Council on *Linking the Local to the Global*** will play a prominent role. In this endeavor, working closely with communities, especially those in the peripheries, becomes paramount. Culture becomes a key entry point, ensuring access to education, services, health, and fostering harmonious coexistence and mutual affection.

### Redefining the Role of Communities

Communities are central to reclaiming the commons. They -we-, own, reactivate, and care for vital commons, including generational knowledge and symbolic spaces. The complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic and global crises force us to reimagine the roles of local and regional governments (LRGs) and communities. We place people at the heart of public policies, fostering alliances like public-public and public-community partnerships.

- We value local knowledge, culture, and data as tools for evidence-based policymaking, political participation, and sustainable futures. The **Policy Council on Trust** will address most of these issues.

### Commons and the Feminist and Care Agenda

The feminist and care agenda intersect seamlessly with the commons agenda. Commons are not just essential for life; they are crucial for the reproduction of life. This shared agenda spans sectors, encompassing care, repair, rebuilding, collaboration, and community listening. It advocates for endogenous growth, with a focus on leaving no one behind.

- Education, particularly gender equality education, plays a pivotal role in driving transformation. Social protection for all populations, including informal workers, is recognized as a critical common. The **Policy Councils on the Commons and Redefining Economies of Equality** will be critical to advance this agenda.

## What does Redefining Finance and the Economy entail?

**The shared aspiration of the organized constituency of LRGs to “Redefine Finance and the Economy” is to completely transform the current economic system,<sup>4</sup> which is focused on growth, hampers resilience during crises, destroys ecosystems and deepens inequalities. This transformation requires changing the functioning of the economic and financial systems (how we finance) but also and primarily on the value system that underpins these systems (why and what we finance).**

### Prioritizing the sustainability of common goods above all

**The utmost priority for our finance and economic systems must be the perpetuation and sustainability of common goods**, because they sustain life. We must preserve the ecosystems and environment that provides us with our vital and irreplaceable common resources that we depend on. All financial and investment decisions that make the economy run should fully consider and protect our finite planet.

- The commons, as will be addressed by the **Policy Council on The Right to the City: Reclaiming the Commons'**, include breathable air, fertile soil, living organisms, forests or water, should be respected, maintained and carefully used for human survival, not exploited unsustainably.
- The **Policy Council on Resilient and Regenerative Territories: Renaturing** will work on how to advance towards a society centered on harmony with nature and human well-being by promoting the principles of climate justice, proximity, urban-rural continuum and regeneration.

### Grounding financial decisions on people's needs

**The objective of our society is to ensure that everyone, without exception, can have their basic needs fulfilled and live to their full potential. In order to achieve this, financial decisions must be grounded and centered on people's needs and wellbeing.** All public and private actors should be guided by the needs of communities when planning investments, measuring progress, developing budgets and managing portfolios with financial implications.

- Our improved practices must also include innovative and creative agreements and tailor-made financial services, such as low interest-rate loans and a full leveraging of taxation. This should help steer finances to a fairer system that halts the deepening of inequalities and sustains basic livelihoods without leaving anyone behind.
- These are the subjects of discussion for the **Policy Council “Opportunities for All: Redefining Finance and Economies of Equalities”**, where, for instance, technology-intensive production and austerity programs that narrow the scope of

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<sup>4</sup> Click here to access the full [Vision Document on Redefining Finance and the Economy](#) for an extensive account of the discussions held in the FEE.

social expenditure and universal public services will be put on the agenda to be reconsidered in the favor of public spending with socially responsible and human-rights based approaches.

#### Encouraging the role of communities for a reterritorialization of financing

**The transformation of financial and economic systems needs to be guided by pathways to urban and territorial equality, whereby communities play an active role in the re-territorialization of financial systems.** Paying attention to intersecting and systemic discrimination is crucial to ensure marginalized populations are heard and taken into account in local policy making processes. Multiple benefits emerge from projects and management modalities centered on local knowledge and experience, such as reorienting funding towards development assistance and more solidarity.

- In democracies, the lack of transparency of financial decisions makes people feel disempowered. This must be remedied by encouraging and ensuring equal representation and participation in decision-making. The **Policy Council “Multilevel Governance: Regaining Trust”** will explore these issues. It will discuss what dedicated mechanisms can be put in place to achieve this goal: the creation of local and social currencies; the promotion of participatory budgeting, including gender-sensitive budgets targeted to women and girls; or the provision of universal and accessible basic public services, among others.

#### Ensuring wide and inclusive participation in the global economic governance

**The principles of multi stakeholder engagement and open governance models must be held as conditions to unlock financial resources in all processes related to infrastructure and service development. This applies also to the discussion fora and decision-making entities of the international financial system,** which need to be governed through inclusive and participatory arrangements that allow for collective decisions that consider all viewpoints.

- In the **Policy Council “Local Multilateralism and City Diplomacy: Linking the Local to the Global”**, the renewal of governance mechanisms to ensure there is continued dialogue among actors at every level will be a central issue. Inclusivity is all the more important when it comes to financing, responding to and managing crises and complex emergencies. Public and private actors alike, NGOs and associations must all join and embrace their **corresponsibility to use finances as a means to serve humanity** and build a better future. **Enhanced high-impact partnerships** are essential for the new system to reflect everyone’s view and for the local and regional governments to be righteously acknowledged in the global development policies.

## What does Regaining Trust entail?

The Future Envisioning Exercise on Trust made it clear that the constituency shares the call in the UN Secretary General's Common Agenda to build trust as a necessary condition to achieve the new social contract.<sup>5</sup> There was a shared understanding of the gravity and complexity of the current drivers of mistrust. **There was also a shared aspiration to ensure safe environments for elected officials, so as to enable them to take risks and foster institutional innovations that improve populations' engagement with public institutions.**

Proximity, transparency and co-creation were highlighted as ways to build trust in the political arena; while quality journalism and scientific cooperation were spotlighted as useful tools.

Developing strategic tools to consider cities as the perfect environment to build trust: 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.** Local innovation is necessary to promote bold actions and alliances to build trust in a context of increasing polarization, the rise of extremism and the multiplication of communication bubbles. As shown in the FEE, 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. Moreover, the adequate provision of local public services is essential for building trust in public institutions among residents.

- The **Policy Council on Multilevel Governance: Regaining Trust** will advance the reflection on how 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. It will explore how to advance the above while taking an intersectional approach to participatory policy and programming, and promoting participatory processes to involve all residents in decision-making and local governance monitoring

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

**Advancing feminist approaches to local governance allows to ingrain elements that are central to build and maintain trust into local governance systems,** such as

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<sup>5</sup> Click here to access the full [Vision Document on Regaining Trust](#) for an extensive account of the discussions held in the FEE.



freedom of speech, artistic expression or ensuring that all populations, including women and girls, have equal access to prosperity opportunities.

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.

- The **Policy Council on Redefining Finance and Economies of Equality**, will be instrumental to this approach.

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.

- The regaining of trust is intrinsically linked to the generation of the commons and the new governmental architecture. The Policy Council on **Right to the City: Reclaiming the Commons** will explore the bidirectional relationship that exists between regaining trust, which guarantees that the commons and the new governance will be a success, and the fact that having these two elements work together is key to regaining the trust of the population.

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

**LRGs must defend the necessary actions, such as the regulation of large media platforms and social media networks, to protect freedom of expression and press freedom from manipulation, fake news, harassment and hate campaigns.** They must also promote rational debates with transparent information, as well as the education of citizens from the early childhood to adults to detect misuse in social networks to the knowledge of institutions and democratic values.

- Moreover, the **Policy Council on Multilevel Governance: Regaining Trust** will also discuss how local and regional governments, due to their proximity to the population and their more direct contact with these concerns, should not only promote measures and actions to restore trust, but should also have a strong voice in national and international debates.
- The concentration of large media corporations, social media platforms and the advertising world that *de facto* controls the media are a source of public distrust. Social and economic inequalities also have an impact in this area. The **Policy**

Council on “**Opportunities for All: Redefining Finance and Economies of Equality**” will look into how to promote a new economic model that allows to reverse inequalities and to finance journalism, science and politics in a fair and independent way.

## What does Rebuilding the Governance Architecture entail?

The shared aspiration of the organized constituency of LRGs to “**Rebuilding the governance architecture**” is to **redefine how power and governance are shared, and who is part of the decision-making tables.**<sup>6</sup> This transformations requires defining a new governance architecture, one that not only involves local and regional governments and other stakeholders in local-to-global decision making (in other words, who is at the table), but that also transforms the current multilateral tools and mechanisms, that are proving themselves unable to face the current crises and emergencies (in short, transforming *what* the global table is).

### Changing the rules of the game and rebuilding trust for a more egalitarian system

As part of the conversation on defining a new governance architecture, advancing local and territorial equality and renewing the social contract were two of the most widely discussed dimensions. **Redefining governance must address the underlying drivers that have led to the increase in inequalities, which have remarkably worsened after the COVID-19 pandemic** – emphasizing how this requires a renewal of decision-making mechanisms and putting in value tools, such as those related to strategic planning, that LRGs can leverage in order to prioritize key actions to address these growing inequalities.

The constituency of local and regional governments and its allies have a shared understanding on the need of renewing governance, and how this entails changing the rules of the game. The renewed social contract that we are looking for needs collective decisions, partnering between local and regional governments and the civil society, as well as local voices at the grassroots level. It is critical that **local and regional governments and their networks be at the heart of global decisions**, bringing the voices of the local communities to decision-making tables.

The renewal of governance is intrinsically linked to the need for building trust. Overcoming governance systems, that focus primarily on national governments at the centre, will also imply transforming multilateral institutions including **LRGs, and non-state actors into spaces that are traditionally still held by national governments, including the United Nations Security Council.**

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<sup>6</sup> Click here to access the full [Vision Document on Rebuilding the Governance Architecture](#) for an extensive account of the discussions held in the FEE.

- The interrelation between local, regional and national governments as well as their relation with the international system will be at the heart of the **Policy Council on Multilevel Governance: Regaining Trust**.
- The need to bring to the global table the values of decentralization, subsidiarity, self-government, and accountability, as well as influencing supranational institutions will be some of the renewed **Policy Council on Local Multilateralism and City Diplomacy: Linking the Global to the Local**.

#### A renewed governance of the New Essentials

The world that we envision is also one in which basic services are guaranteed, and the role of local and regional governments is ensured in its delivery. **The governance of the right to housing, universal health coverage, education, decent work, inclusivity, and the right to food and water is critical to ensure that they properly reach our populations.**

The governance of the commons needs to be financed by a renewed global financial ecosystem. To respond to the inequality in income distribution and the challenges that governments face in curbing inequalities, the financial ecosystem needs to transform in order to transform our world. The taxation frameworks need to be rethought, profit can no longer be our only motor. It is thus essential that we envision a new way of measuring wellbeing, and empower non-state actors and finance the goals.

- The Commons, as addressed by the Policy Council on The Right to the City: Reclaiming the Commons, include not just the common goods, but the identified as “new essentials”, and their governance needs ensure they are respected, maintained and carefully used for human survival.
- Shifting the focus from profit to people, financing to curb inequalities, and a renewed financial ecosystem for the common goods is one of the focuses of the **Policy Council on Opportunities for All: Redefining Finance and Economies of Equality**.

#### Harmony with our ecosystems: A renewed governance for the planet

A multilateral system that is focused on development in harmony with our ecosystems, that adopts an inclusive approach to the governance of crisis building on local, territorial, and indigenous knowledge is the way forward to rebuild our systems in consonance with the world that surrounds us.

- Multilevel governance systems need to be prepared for addressing the new demands of responding to complex emergencies- in particular, the climate crisis, the compounding health emergencies, and all other emergencies, and will be linked to the focus of the **Policy Council on Resilient and Regenerative Territories: Renaturing**

## A cross-cutting Vision for the Future

Critical links emerged throughout the four initial Future Envisioning Exercises, showcasing how the four entry points identified are not self-standing but, rather, allow for unfolding of the UCLG Pact for the Future - Daejeon Political Declaration in a transversal manner.

- **All FEEs addressed the importance of guaranteeing the new essentials and basic services, including the common goods.** This calls for renewing finance to ensure it could allow for a renewed service delivery, and protecting the commons and the new essentials, which in turn needed need to develop a multistakeholder alliance for financing development, as well as a broader in global economic governance as a means to and ensuring a renewed model of governance.
- **All FEEs highlighted the need to place care at the centre, and developing a feminist way of governing was seen as a way to protect the delivery of common goods, as well as to develop the affective component of trust.** By placing care at the core of actions, participants argued, the focus shifts away from profits and is guided towards people, the planet, and governance. This implies, as well, a shift away from a multilateral system that is built around national governments, by applying the principle of subsidiarity to how we govern.
- **All FEE showcased the importance of partnerships, which were an integral part of all exercises and identified as necessary for any future steps to be taken.** Chief among them was building ties between academia and the local and regional governments, to develop evidence-based policies, especially in a moment of compounding crises and emergencies. The need to establish renewed partnerships between our constituency and the international system, as well as other spheres of government, was seen as essential to transform the governance architecture and to fundamentally shift how we finance sustainable development. Partnerships with the media and building ties with journalists was identified as critical to rebuild trust. While partnerships with civil society were also seen as essential for trust, as well as to develop participatory approaches to govern the commons.

## Thinking forward

As summarized in the present Outlook, the outcomes of the FEE held around the four entry points to the UCLG Pact for the Future have contributed to informing the upcoming discussions of the renewed UCLG Policy Councils. Yet, it is important to look forward: the FEEs will continue to be a space for co-creation, also allowing the renewed Policy Councils to convey collective discussions around pressing issues:

- For the **Policy Council on The Right to the City: Reclaiming the Commons**, these issues include advancing frontrunning discussions and partnerships on sexual and reproductive rights, caring and food systems and demographic change.
- For the **Policy Council on Opportunities for All: Redefining Finance and Economies of Equality**, further FEEs will allow to advance discussions on the future of jobs, how to finance the localization of the 2030 Agenda and the other international commitments towards sustainable development, or how to redistribute care responsibilities.
- The **Policy Council on Multilevel Governance: Regaining Trust** will also enable shared reflections on how to meaningfully engage the youth, the promotion of antiracism, and governing in partnerships.
- In the case of the **Policy Council Local Multilateralism and City Diplomacy: Linking the Local to the Global**, FEEs will also allow to catalyse joint efforts to advance high impact initiatives, put forward a local emergency governance system with care and empathy at its centre, and promote a renewed peace agenda.
- While the **Policy Council on Resilient and Regenerative Territories: Renaturing** will galvanize shared efforts to advance discussions on loss and damages, climate justice, adequately valuing indigenous knowledges and nature-based solutions from a local perspective.