Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals

Accelerating and supporting the implementation of the SDGs at the local level

Keynote Speech

Maimunah Mohd Sharif
Executive Director
UN-Habitat

25 February 2019
08.45-09.30 High-Level Opening
Seville, Spain



Honorable Ministers,

Honorable Mayors,

Colleagues from the UN family,

Honorable delegates, ladies and gentlemen, partners in Localizing the 2030 Agenda,

A very good morning to you!

1. I am very happy to be here with you today, on behalf the whole United Nations System that has come together to organize this important event. The Sustainable Development Goals are proving to be an agenda that brings everybody together in a common effort to make Agenda 2030 a reality for all, therefore leaving no one behind.

2. From UN agencies to central and local governments, to the civil society and the private sector, Sustainable Development Goals are unifying us.

3. As the coordinating United Nations agency on human settlements, UN-Habitat has been working on localizing the SDGs since year 2014, together with our partners UNDP and United Cities and Local Governments . This partnership has achieved concrete results in mobilizing hundreds of local government associations to work towards the local implementation of Agenda 2030. Cities today are at the forefront of implementation of the SDGs thanks to their commitment and conviction that Agenda 2030 is already their own agenda, as a

majority of the SDG targets are already a responsibility of local and regional governments all over the world.

4. Honorable Ministers, Honorable Mayors, Honorable delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

5. In the light of our work with UNDP, United Cities and Local Governments and the United Nations Capital Development Fund, I would like to share three key messages with you this morning.

6. My first message is about the need for strong partnerships between local and central governments.

7. The lessons we have learned so far, point to the obvious reality that the SDGs are a unique opportunity to create new partnerships. Indeed, To address the needs of the most vulnerable in communities around the world, including women, children, youth, older persons and people with disabilities, we need a bolder and more inclusive approach to partnership by bringing together civil society, businesses, international bodies, organizations of faith, and individuals, among other actors. However, the first partnership needs to be between central and local governments to establish a new multi-level governance system able to share responsibilities in a more just and efficient way.

8. This is why I am very happy to see, here in Seville, how central governments have responded to the call of the Government of Spain to be here

today to sit at the same table with local, regional government and other local stakeholders to share experiences and solutions on how to make that Agenda 2030 reach the local level and local communities.

9. My second message is a call for action.

10. The approval of Agenda 2030 constitutes a unique opportunity to literally change the world. However, to be a reality for all, we need concrete actions to be taken at the local level, led by cities and local governments with the involvement of local stakeholders and citizens.

11. Localizing the SDGs is key to establishing a direct link between the global agenda and the impact in the lives of citizens. In this regard, local governments are best placed as the closest institutions to the people. This said, in many ways, local government still need support to be able to deliver Agenda 2030. They are committed and have bought into the 2030 Agenda, but we cannot abandon them with the burden to implement this multidimensional and complex agenda without the necessary legal frameworks, human and financial capacities and innovative tools to catalyze the participation of citizens, the private sector and civil society organizations.

12. They need our support! Can we commit here, today, to supporting local governments?

13. They need our support to overcome the many challenges they are confronted with. Allow me to mention but a few.

14. The key role of local and regional governments in achieving sustainable development is still not fully recognized. We need to bring back the local dimension of development that involves creating local leadership in close collaboration with central governments. Agenda 2030 calls for “integrated solutions” to break down traditional development sector silos and create horizontal policy coherence, integration and partnerships across social, economic, and environmental sectors. No actor alone can achieve all 17 SDGs. A new change of paradigm is needed as well as new mechanisms to make useful contributions from the public sector, the citizen and the organized civil society.

15. Local governments and local communities need renewed enabling environments, including fiscal and political decentralization processes, when appropriate. But also a renewed trust from central governments in the capacity of local governments to deliver and finally technical and managerial capacities for local governments to be “able to do their job”.

16. More discussions need to be held on localizing finance, if we want to achieve the Agenda 2030. Central governments still need to understand that empowering local governments with predictable and reliable sources of funding and clear expenditure assignments is empowering their own delivery of the

SDGs. Some of the issues include meeting recurrent expenditure obligations, maximizing own source revenue, achieving predictable and stable levels of fiscal transfer from central government, developing alternative sources of finance, such as loans, PPPs and bonds.

17. Innovative tools are needed to strengthen participation of citizens, civil society and the private sector to contribute to the opportunities offered by the Sustainable Development Goals.

18. I have no doubt that this event in Seville will help identify solutions on the empowerment of local governments to be able to deliver better, to more effectively engage local citizens and to establish fruitful and sustainable dialogues between all spheres of government.

19. My third message is on the role of UN-Habitat.

20. Honorable Ministers, Honorable Mayors, Honorable delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

21. UN-Habitat recognizes the multiplicity of national, regional and local governmental agencies and organizations with competing interests and influence. Strengthening the role of local governments requires that the institutional framework is coordinated and transparent.

22. We believe in the need for a multiscale and multilevel approach that requires vertical coordination across levels of government and horizontal coordination across issues and social sectors.

23. For these reasons we stand ready to support you as you localize the SDGs, in developing integrated and holistic plans and strategies that we will strengthen integration and coordination across various levels of governments and result in transformational initiatives through which no one and no place will be left behind.

24. Before I conclude, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the organizers for making UN-Habitat part of this event, the great team at Local 2030 and to the Government of Spain, who has always believed in the cause of local democracy and local development as key to achieving sustainable development. I know that the process of localization is very advanced in Spain, thanks in part to the leadership of the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces. My sincere thanks to all the UN agencies that have made this event possible and finally, my salute to the Mayor and the city of Seville, for hosting us in this beautiful and charming place.

Thank you for your attention!