

FROM VISION TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

THE UCLG ANNUAL RETREAT STARTS WITH A BELIEF IN COMMON HUMANITY



Around 300 local leaders and experts are meeting this week in Barcelona to prepare the action plan for the next years of the world's largest global network of local and regional governments and their associations, United and Cities Local Governments (UCLG). Four months ago, in October 2022, the General Assembly of UCLG adopted the Pact for

the Future of Humanity as the outcome document of the 7th UCLG Congress in Daejeon, Republic of Korea. The main goal of the UCLG Annual Retreat is to deploy the Pact's vision within its commitment to common humanity and "the power of collective action, empowerment, shared ownership, cocreation, and international cooperation and solidarity".

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The UCLG Secretary General, Emilia Saiz, welcomed retreat participants to the “organizations’ kitchen”, a space for co-creating a strategy for collective action. Saiz highlighted that “the Power of We” means the collective effort to see, understand, and act on issues in the world in its totality”. The concept also means that UCLG is advocating an approach to urban issues that is centered less on numbers and more on humanity, with the “revolution of care” and “revolution of emotions” as cornerstones.

Both the UCLG collective vision and a guiding reference to actions and partnerships come together through the “Power of We”. This Power refers to the collaborative and transformative potential of the network of local and regional governments, and their partners gathered within UCLG to strive together for a better future for our societies and planet.

The capacity of UCLG as a driving force that works on stopping the polarization in cities was mentioned by Pedro Bravo, the founder of Sondalia, who was one of the creators of the “Power of We” narrative. The need to connect different levels of government and act as a movement rather than just a network was highlighted by Octavi de la Varga, from Local4Action HUB Barcelona province.

The representative from the European Commission, Andrea Ferrari-Bravo, valued the partnership with UCLG and the joint advocacy efforts on the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He also mentioned that today there is an opportunity for UCLG and the different partners to be part of the renewal process of the Local Government Policy of 2013.

The Pact’s commitment to a Global Feminist Movement was reinforced by the intervention of Ana Falú, UCLG Ubuntu Advisor. She stressed the need to increase the number of women in local and national leadership positions, as well as the urgency to recognize the work of grassroots women in their communities and neighbourhoods.

The Vice-Mayor of Libreville and UCLG Policy Advisor, Annie Chrystel Limbourg Iwenga, made a call for action to enhance public-private partnerships. Furthermore, the Secretary-General of FLACMA, Sergio Arredondo, highlighted the people-centred approach of the Pact and the need to prioritize and be present in the redefinition of the global agendas in the current context of polycrises.

The panel concluded with a call to empower narratives around care, empathy, inclusiveness, trust and solidarity.





UNFOLDING THE PACT: HARNESSING GLOBAL EFFORTS

The second day of the UCLG Retreat focused on listening to different UCLG members and partners and their reflections on how to deploy the Pact for the Future.

One of the most relevant groups participating in the discussion is the Permanent Working Group on Capacity and Building, a technical platform for professionals from Local Government Associations, represented by Neila Akrimi, from VNG International. Akrimi advocated for a stronger role for local governments and a reinforcement of the UCLG's membership capacities.

The President of the Habitat International Coalition, Adriana Allen, referred to UCLG as a compass not only for the local governments, but also for academia, and other stakeholders. She stressed that the UCLG should focus the attention on girls and boys, the struggles of ordinary citizens, then feminist research to acknowledge women, and address legacy and issues from the past, such as colonialism.

The Secretary General of UCLG Eurasian regional section, Rasikh Sagitov, mentioned the SDGs localization efforts in his region, as well as the challenges to strengthen climate action and resilience. The Secretary-General of UCLG MEWA, Mehmed Duman, shared memory of the recent death and injured numbers in Syria and Turkiye after an earthquake. He stressed the role of UCLG in supporting and facilitating exchange in cooperation in relief and later recovery and reconstruction. UCLG MEWA is also facing the highest levels of migration. The group is working on advocating for cultural rights, democracy, and decentralization.

From UCLG Africa, Rahmatouca Sow Dièye, mentioned that in this time of wars and conflicts, it is not common in the international arena to have all stakeholders from all countries at the table and be able for all of them to speak and work together. "We need to be more democratic in

order to have a better future", she stressed. The region is growing in feminist governance and in SDGs localization.

Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and Head of the UN Office of Disaster Risk Reduction, stressed the importance of showing solidarity in crisis situations. She further noted that this solidarity often comes from local and regional support more than from the national government. She called for local governments to strengthen their local resilience and hoped that local and regional governments will play a bigger role in global multilateralism.

Richard Shakespeare, Assistant Chief Executive Council for the Planning & Property Development and Culture, Recreation and Economic Services, invited the participants to attend the upcoming UCLG Culture Summit in Dublin. Last year, Dublin won the Fifth edition of the International Award UCLG - Mexico City - Culture 21 with the 'AWE' - *Cultural Engagement through Accessibility, Wellbeing and Evidence* project devoted to considering the cultural life of people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dublin is ready to share its experience showcasing its achievements, including the Culture Near You Project, which tracks cultural infrastructure with map use and data.

Elana Wong, the representative of the Youth Caucus, which has been part of the UCLG Town Halls, referred to the "Power of We" and the need to transform it into concrete actions. She also advocated for extending the UCLG participatory approaches at the regional level.

The Secretary-General of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, Fabrizio Rossi, expressed his support to deploy the Pact and announced the launch of a Territorial Diplomacy Hub in collaboration with UCLG and Eurocities in Brussels in June 2023.

THE FACTORY

The 2023 UCLG Retreat has been structured around daily interactive spaces to engage with participants and to construct a common narrative together. Inspired by the Pact for the Future and the venue where the retreat is taking place, an old textile factory building, the workshops have been named as “Factory of the Future”.

The first day’s Future Envisioning Workshop aimed to identify skills, tools, and materials in several areas of work (“We Care Toolboxes”) using the main axis of the Power of We: We Care, and thus We Act, We Meet, We Advocate, We Listen, We Research, and We Learn.

On the second day, two workshops took place. In the morning, participants explored the impact of concrete actions and resources to improve the way the Pact is monitored, engaging through a World Café methodology. And in the afternoon, collective thinking exercises were put in place to reflect on the four enablers of the Pact for the Future: Commons, Finance, Trust and Governance Architecture.

Ten commandments to work in the Factory of the Future

1. Everyone participates.
2. Ensure that all the voices are heard.
3. Be empathic and care about others.
4. Embrace the past and think about what is possible to do in the future.
5. Think about how to make a difference in the daily lives of citizens.
6. Be bold and creative.
7. Everyone sits together in the same space.
8. Change tables and talk with as many people as possible.
9. Try to avoid speaking only in UCLG jargon.
10. Dance when there is music in the room.





“COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION AMONG THE SPHERES OF GOVERNMENT IS ONE OF OUR FIRST PRIORITIES”

BHEKE STOFIE, PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (SALGA), CO-PRESIDENT OF UCLG

What are the opportunities and challenges of the Pact and the Retreat from the South African and African perspectives?

The future will only be bleak if it is not prepared by the current leadership. The important thing is that we need to unite to propel the future. That is the point of the UCLG Retreat for me: ‘We’ focuses on what we can do individually and collectively. If you clap your hands, for instance, with two fingers, the noise cannot be heard. However, if you clap all ten fingers together, you can create a noise that can be heard by everyone. This metaphor demonstrates the importance of the union of local government practitioners.

Moreover, in the South African context, we define local government as a public business, a business to govern the commons, and we focus on inter-governmental relations that can make changes for members of UCLG anywhere

in the world, as long as the individual spaces have been configured.

Regarding the Pact, I think that each of us has a responsibility to contribute towards the future. The future is not going to fall from the sky. All of us must work towards building it. That is why, to me, the ‘We’ part of the discussion is so important. It shows the importance of joining hands for not just our future but that of our children as well.

What are your priorities for the next years?

The first priority should strive to invest more time in joining hands and moving as a united force. I liked the opening remark of the Secretary General, Emilia Saiz, yesterday, about cooking and looking for the type of food you want, contributing ingredients from around the world to address a multiplicity of challenges. One of these challenges is hunger, others are housing or education. You can only achieve that collaboration by being creative as a government and representing the interests of our people since they expect us to contribute. Therefore, with the multitude of issues to address, collaboration and coordination among the spheres of government is one of our first priorities.

The second priority is to create conducive conditions for our partners to invest in the lives of our people, making sure that the communities of today are different, better communities tomorrow. One of the themes here is that there must be peace and stability for all. Today, I heard stories about what is happening in Syria and Turkey, and this made me think about how much governments and communities are struggling when confronted with disasters of this scale. We really need global leaders to unite and stand together to address issues such as these.

What is the current context of South African local authorities and municipalism in Africa?

One of the main challenges in local government currently, both on the global scale and also at home in South Africa, is the attitude that other spheres of government have towards local government. They see it as a burden, an institution that is not worth the time or financial resources.

One of the biggest challenges in South Africa, is to change the financial allocation of municipal system. For instance, we as local government have looked into the constitution of the Republic. It allocates responsibilities in the three spheres of government and has established three tiers of responsibilities. Thus, based on what I have seen in parliament, the implementation of this is something we must pursue.

There are other challenges to confront as well as local government, because if we do not, they are going to haunt us in the years to come.

First, there is the shrinking of municipal financial resources. For example, in South Africa, out of a hundred constitutionally assigned functions, 46 are performed in municipalities, so we need corresponding financial resources. We are in conversations now about how to restructure that to deal with the existing imbalance.

Second, we need to regroup the configuration of local government. In South Africa, the government rarely responds to the political will of the people from the bottom up. Only a few seats in parliament are given to mayors, which does not reflect the aspirations of a big city like Johannesburg. If we are not dealing with this, it is going to be a problem for us and for the future.

Third, we need to talk about productivity in the market. By that, I mean the need to develop a rigorous assessment of the performance of local government practitioners in delivering the service desired by voters, who are our shareholders. They expect a return on their investment, which is going out and voting for us. Returns on investments in local government are the quality of services that we provide for the citizens. That quality of service speaks to the value of politicians.

How could the Pact for the Future unfold in Africa?

Listening to the Secretary General, Emilia Saiz, yesterday in the opening and then today, I am seeing the future becoming so much brighter. This is because if, and only if, we agree that there is nothing that is too difficult to deal with, and if we all come together to deal with difficult issues, we are ready to deliver. In unbecoming conditions, always rise to the occasion to see results. The movement is beginning to see the importance of the need to act globally but operate locally.

Any challenge that affects people anywhere in the globe also affects local government practitioners. A sense of solidarity and standing together is an answer to that, and I see that this is growing, there is more interest and there are more contributions. Today, there was a great example

of that: 'We' asked UCLG to leave no one behind, and the Secretary General responded and emphasised that we need to bring everybody on board.

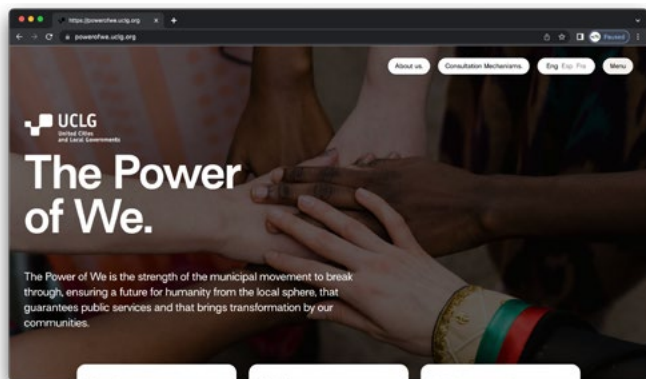
What are your expectations for the outcome of the Retreat?

I am a person who believes that a bad situation cannot be changed by only complaining about it. It must be changed by taking a step back and saying, how did I come to find myself here and what can I do to change my situation. Indeed, that is one thing that I always say: do not cry along with a person because you see tears coming out of their eyes but rather give them a shoulder to cry on. Demonstrate that you understand the challenge and then support overcoming it.

The funding gap is one of the challenges for the future, and so is building trust. This must happen in different spheres of government. The resilience and the commitment I have seen so far give me hope that tomorrow is going to be better than today. The strength of everyone in the global perspective lies in saying "count me in" in confronting the challenges of the future. Be it fighting hunger, poverty, building community resilience, or tackling a problem happening somewhere far away, people belonging to a local system must come together and be go-getters in solving the problem. We must demand from the United Nations that they develop a new resolution to unite the people of the world.

Finally, I would like to say that there are no limitations to the way forward. We must fly as high as we can. Of course, this journey is not going to be easy and there will be ups and downs. Yet, we must stay focused and say, in the name of the people that have lost their lives in Syria and in Turkey due to the earthquake, that we stand together. Moreover, we must also emphasize that local governments are global, and that we support them, and that we talk to leaders in other spheres of government to end war, suffering, and hunger. We fight for prosperity to change the conditions of all people for the better.



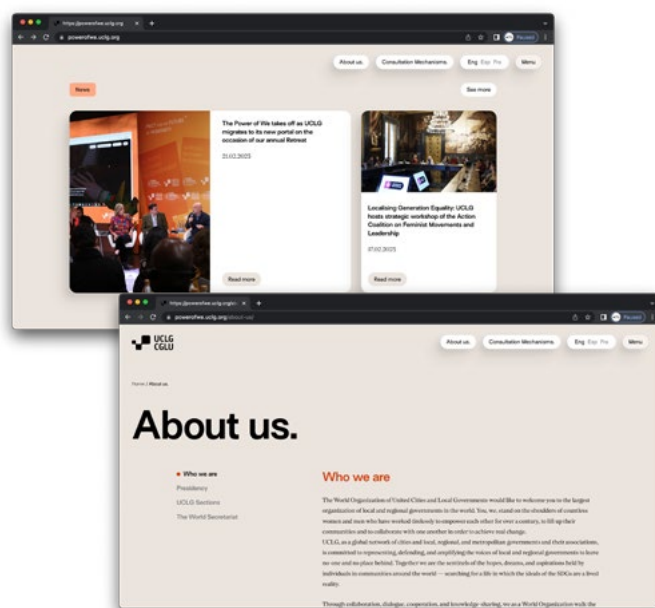


A NEW WEBSITE FOR THE POWER OF WE

The renewed UCLG website, the *Power of We*, was launched on the first day of the organisation's annual retreat on 20 February 2022. The main goal of the new portal is to strengthen the municipal movement and its collective action through resources, research, and advocacy efforts. It focuses on unfolding the *Pact for the Future*, the key outcome document of the 7th UCLG World Congress, which is defining the strategic priorities for the organisation from 2023 to 2028.

The Portal brings a narrative on the importance of how WE CARE for humanity and each other. It aims to engage the network and partners and to show their work and actions that make the *Pact for the Future* narrative come alive through a co-creation process. It is not just the work of UCLG as an institution, but the collective voice to multiply the individual voices and actions of the municipal movement.

Visit: powerofwe.uclg.org



HISTORIC AGREEMENT FOR PROMOTING ACCESSIBILITY AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN IN CITIES

On Monday, the UCLG and the World Blind Union (WBU) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to solidify and enhance the partnership between the two organisations. They will use the partnership to focus on the "how" of accessibility, striving to translate countries' commitments into tangible improvements in cities. *"UCLG is committed to promoting inclusion, accessibility and universal design, and it is through partnerships with organisations like the WBU that we will translate our commitments into action"*, said Emilia Saiz, UCLG Secretary General.

The partnership of UCLG and members of WBU will work on ensuring the active and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in the design and implementation of urban policies, programmes and services, and the vital role of local and regional governments in removing barriers to inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities. *"We are thrilled to sign this MoU with UCLG and believe that it represents an important step towards addressing accessibility barriers and ensuring inclusion of persons with disabilities in cities and communities around the globe"*, said Marc Workman, CEO of the World Blind Union.

In addition to the expected improved exchange of information and best practices as well as the establishment of joint advocacy efforts and projects, the UCLG and the WBU will leverage their respective mandates and strengths to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in urban development. They will also support the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The WBU is a founding member of the International Disability Alliance and the leading global voice for an estimated 253 million persons worldwide who are blind or partially sighted. Its members consist of over 250 organisations in more than 190 countries.



PALO ALTO: FROM A TEXTILE FACTORY TO A CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC CENTRE

Palo Alto, the venue for the 2023 UCLG Retreat, is closely connected to the history of Barcelona. At the end of the 19th century, when Barcelona was well-known for its textile industry, two Catalan entrepreneurs dedicated to the manufacture of wool yarn, asked for permission to build the space. After them, other owners contributed to enlarge and renovate the original building until 1980, when, coinciding with a profound economic crisis of the city, it was completely abandoned.

Thanks to the renovation that the area experienced with the Olympic Games 1992, a project was created to convert the factory into a commercial and advertising film studio called "Palo Alto", inspired by the eponymous city in California. In 1990, the designer Javier Mariscal installed his studio there, which led to a group of design and creation professionals also hiring spaces.

When the grounds were declared expropriate, the artistic and cultural movement of the city defended to preserve the place and the possibility that the site would become a space of creation and design.

Since 1997, the Palo Alto Foundation has managed the space, and it concentrates different disciplines and artistic and cultural areas of the city of Barcelona. Architectural studies, photography, sculpture, painting, editorial, graphics, and fashion, among others, turn the space into an urban laboratory that generates co-creation and collective knowledge to feed the cultural and artistic environment of the city.

Palo Alto is home to 16 companies, 94% of them with local capital, that generate more than 250 direct jobs. In the past 29 years, it has hosted more than 60 companies.



TWITTER SAYS!

#UCLGMeets, #FactoryoftheFuture, #HumanRights, #FeministLeadership or #EarthquakeinSyria are some of the hashtags used by those participating in the first two days of the UCLG Retreat 2023, in person or from home.

"The Factory of the Future is already underway", say some tweeters. The Factory needs cooperation, collective action, and the exchange of knowledge to prevail because its gears do not work with just the efforts of a few. Moving forward requires the diversity of all the voices, including the local and regional, that make up the #UCLGMeets family. That is what people share from their accounts: the joy of coming together again in Barcelona, "working together, once again, for human rights and towards a care revolution" or "underlining the importance of capacity development, the search for new solutions and continuous learning to transform the bold #PactfortheFuture into #local4action".

In less than 280 characters, many tweets talk about creativity, urban journalism and the diversity that makes us a united community. Tweeters also listen to reinforce, the importance of feminism, and the need to repair injustices. Sustaining a democratic and just urban life is not a question of women, but of democracy, and the way both citizens and decision-makers handle daily events. Through tweets, people talk about solidarity and respect for the victims of earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. They highlight the importance of local governments that have been able to respond quickly to the terrible catastrophes that unfolded in Turkey and Syria.

The maximum number of characters does not matter, because with a few words, everything that constitutes the #PowerofWe is already said: We Care, We Listen, We Meet, We Research, We Learn, We Act, and We Advocate.

In these first two days that mark the beginning of the Retreat, "we come together because the strength of the municipal movement will guarantee a better future for all humanity", but we also come together to be able to "see who we are, where we come from and where we want to go in the future."