Press Release
The Committee on Morocco’s new development model and UCLG Africa Placing Territories at the centre for balanced development

On 8 July 2020, the President of the Commission on Morocco’s new development model, His Excellency Chakib Benmoussa, granted audience to a delegation of the United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLGA Africa) led by its Secretary General, Mr. Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, and including Mr. François Paul Yatta, Director of Programs, and Mr. Mohamed Cherkaoui, Head of Protocol and in charge of Relations with Administrations. The meeting that was also attended by Mr. Mohamed EL Mahdi Gaouane, Director of the Cabinet of the President of the Commission and Ms. Ihssane Guennoun, Task Manager, took place at the Commission’s headquarters in Hay Ryad, Rabat.

The Secretary General of UCLG Africa first welcomed the clear-sightedness of His Majesty King Mohammed VI who felt the need to reflect on a new development model for Morocco before the COVID-19 pandemic imposes the obvious need for it all over the world. He then praised the effective way Morocco is managing the health crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and expressed the thanks of the community of mayors and heads of local authorities in Africa for the solidarity shown by the Kingdom of Morocco towards its sister countries in Africa through the sending of medical and protective equipment and medicines to these countries, at a time when everywhere else in the world the pandemic has created a reflex of selfishness.

Mr. Mbassi then recalled the important role that the Government of Morocco has played in the creation of UCLG Africa. In particular, he underlined the fact that since the organization’s headquarters were established in Rabat, Morocco, in 2008, UCLG Africa has continued to receive multifaceted support from the Moroccan Government and local authorities and their representative associations, all of which are members of the continental organization.

At its founding congress held in May 2005 in Tshwane, capital of the Republic of South Africa, the members of UCLG Africa defined the general objective of the continental organization of local and regional authorities as contributing to the unity of the continent and promoting its development from the bottom up. It is this orientation that guides the commitment and action of the 48 national associations and some 2,000 cities and territories across the continent regrouped within UCLG Africa.

This return to the territories or to the impulse of development from the territories is now a must for all countries wishing to improve the standard of living and the living conditions of their populations in a sustainable way.

This reflection has matured within UCLG Africa over successive Africities Summits, one of the most remarkable of which took place in Marrakesh in December 2009, under the leadership of His Excellency Chakib Benmoussa, then Minister of the Interior of the Kingdom of Morocco.
The 2009 Africities Summit in Marrakesh made this event one of the largest international platforms where not only the issues of decentralization and the role of local and regional authorities are debated, but more generally the contribution and perspective of local and regional authorities in the design of a new development model.

The Marrakesh Summit in 2009 already announced the ambition of African local and regional authorities to take part in the debate on the development model, since the theme chosen at the time was: "the response of African local and regional authorities to the global crisis: promoting sustainable local development and employment".

At the sixth Africities Summit held in Dakar in 2012, the theme chosen, "building African unity from its territories", affirmed the will of the members of UCLG Africa to take a greater part in the dynamics of development and integration of the Continent.

In 2015, at the Africities Summit in Johannesburg, UCLG Africa drew attention to the need to better take into account the contribution of cities and territories in the structural transformation of the Continent promoted by the African Union’s Agenda 2063.

Then, during the eighth edition of the Africities Summit held in Marrakech in 2018, the issue of the transition towards sustainable cities and territories was debated, an issue that is now on the agenda of reflections at the global level.

Five points of attention emerged as levers for action to initiate this transition towards sustainable cities and territories:

1. Mobilizing women and youth as driving forces for the transformation of African societies. The establishment by UCLG Africa of the Network of Locally Elected Women in Africa (REFELA) and the African Network of Young Elected Local Government Officials is a response in this respect;

2. Taking into account the need to involve local and regional authorities in climate action in order to increase its ambition and impact. To this end, UCLG Africa has set up a “Climate Task Force” to promote the territorialization of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in application of the Paris Agreement and a bottom-up approach to the elaboration of NDCs starting with the definition of Locally Determined Contributions (LDCs);

3. Make greater efforts to manage urbanization by relying more on the capacity of public authorities to implement urban and spatial planning. A series of partnership agreements were concluded in this area at the 2018 Africities Summit: between Casablanca and Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire; Rabat and Dakar, Senegal; Marrakesh and Yaoundé, Cameroon; Dakhla and Rufisque, Senegal; Essaouira and Jinja, Uganda; Al Hoceima and Abomey, Benin; El Jadida and Sousse, Tunisia. These agreements were co-signed by UN Habitat, UCLG Africa, and MAJAL, the association of urban agencies in Morocco. A specific agreement was also concluded between UCLG Africa, MAJAL, and the Al Omrane Holding Company to monitor the implementation of these partnership agreements;

4. Involving local and regional authorities in the management of migration and in the monitoring of the Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migrations. To this end, a Charter of Local and
Regional Governments of Africa on Migration was adopted at the Africities 2018 Summit, which sets out the recommendations of local and regional authorities in this area;

5. Promote culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable local development, in particular through the celebration of the African Capitals of Culture. The city of Rabat has been chosen to be the first African Capital of Culture for the years 2020 and 2021.

The ninth edition of the Africities Summit, scheduled for 16-20 November 2021 in Kisumu, Kenya, will discuss the role of intermediary cities in the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. This is the first time that the Africities Summit will be hosted in a so-called secondary city. It is both a sign and a message to pay greater attention to this level of local government, which is home to nearly a third of the continent’s urban population and whose growth rates are generally higher than those observed in large cities or small towns.

The Secretary General welcomed the fact that at last the message on the territorializing of public policies and on the impetus for development from the territories was once again being heard, whereas over the last 30 years the doxa had been that development should be driven first and foremost by the country's integration into the dynamics of the globalized economy.

The Secretary General of UCLG Africa ended his speech by congratulating Morocco on the brilliant election as President of the world organization of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG World), of Dr Mohamed Boudra, Mayor of Al Hoceima, President of the Moroccan Association of Presidents of Communal Councils (AMPCC), Vice-President of UCLG Africa for the North Africa Region. This election, which took place during the UCLG World Congress held in November 2019 in Durban, South Africa, would not have been possible without the remarkable and decisive mobilization of mayors and local authorities from all over the African continent alongside their Moroccan colleagues.

For African elected representatives, the choice of a Moroccan mayor to preside over the world organization of territorial authorities for three years (from 2020 to 2022) is a recognition of the major role played by the Kingdom in promoting decentralized governance on the continent, but also more responsible development in terms of energy and the environment. The success of COP 22 held in November 2016 in Marrakech, and the important initiatives that His Majesty King Mohammed VI launched on this occasion in favor of inter-African cooperation in the field of climate, have definitively established Morocco among the most advanced countries on the continent to begin the transition towards low-carbon development.

The African local elected representatives call for the official reception of Dr. Boudra and the UCLG World Bureau by the highest authorities of the Kingdom of Morocco to mark the honor done to the continent to see one of its sons be the representative face of the mayors and territorial authorities of the World.

In response to the words of the Secretary General of UCLG Africa, the President of the Commission on Morocco's new development model underlined how much Morocco is claiming its African roots for which a strong will is brought to the highest level of the State by His Majesty King Mohammed VI.
His Excellency Chakib Benmoussa also confirmed the importance of the question of the territories in the work of the Commission. While being open to the world, Morocco considers that a strong territorial anchorage is necessary to envisage balanced development. It is at the territorial level that awareness of the importance of biodiversity and the limited nature of natural resources had been raised. There is a kind of paradox in pursuing unlimited economic growth when we know that natural resources are limited.

Integrating the dimension of sustainability and the limitation of natural resources means that local contexts must be better taken into consideration when defining the content and trajectories of development. In concrete terms, this means less top-down policies and more bottom-up policies. It is this evolution in approaches that inspires the methodology followed by the Commission, which places great emphasis on listening to actors on the ground. It is indeed at the level of the territories that we need to create favorable conditions to convey shared values with the populations concerned.

At the cultural level, Morocco cultivates and celebrates its cultural diversity, which is a source of richness for the country and contributes to its influence and the affirmation of its identity. Africa has an extremely rich tangible and intangible heritage that must be recognized, protected and promoted. For this to happen, African countries must work hand in hand. The proposal to celebrate the African Capitals of Culture is an absolutely essential initiative to strengthen the cultural links between our countries and contribute to better enriching the cultural heritage of humanity with the input of Africa.

The dimension of inclusion is also at the heart of the Commission's work, as this concern is shared by all local and national authorities. There are populations in vulnerable situations everywhere, and UCLG Africa is right to point out the attention that must be paid to migration. Reasoned migration indeed requires a different approach to inclusion and living together. It also highlights the need to look at migration not only from a security perspective but also for its contribution to development, the circulation of knowledge and friendship between peoples.

With regard to the management of urbanization, cities of all sizes face many challenges in terms of employment, the development of economic activities and social expectations. Without regulatory mechanisms, medium-sized cities could be the losers in the integration of countries into the globalized economy. Consequently, they must organize themselves into networks in order to carry weight and focus above all on the development of their hinterland.

The President of the Commission concluded that many of the reflections led by UCLG Africa are also on the Commission's agenda on Morocco's new development model. This is why, the President said, it is necessary to continue the exchanges started between the two organizations.

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