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Call for inputs: Human Rights Council resolution 51/12 on local government and human rights

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The City of Los Angeles has made great strides in advancing global norms at the local level in partnership with academic institutions, especially within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Writing from the perspective of academic partners, we provide the following input to highlight key lessons and challenges regarding human rights implementation at the local level against the backdrop of increasing "localization" of international agreements. Bringing to bear our collective experiences over the past five years, we highlight how human rights can and have emerged in broader initiatives to localize, especially through the leadership of the Mayor's office, and the advocacy of and collaboration with academic institutions.

We believe, however, that there are opportunities to build institutional capacity and shift from implicit to more explicit attention to human rights and human rights-based approaches in local government. Specifically, as cities such as Los Angeles prioritize issue areas, from climate action to housing and homelessness, human rights practitioners must continue to both advocate and provide support to government on how to enable more integrated local policy approaches that recognize how human rights intersect and are deeply embedded within and across these issues.

1. What capacity building initiatives have been taken to implement/incorporate human rights in local administration?

    a. Please provide information on institutional structures for coordination and harmonization of capacity building initiatives.
        i. **Creation of Mayor's Office of International Affairs**: Former Mayor Eric Garcetti appointed Amb. Nina Hachigian as Los Angeles' first Deputy Mayor of International Affairs to lead the corresponding Office of International Affairs. The office was part of a broader mission to strengthen Los Angeles' diplomatic endeavors and engagement with foreign policy and the international community. As part of its key agenda, the office led efforts to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, made possible with support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and the appointment of a Fellow responsible for integration of the Sustainable Development Goals into the work of the city of Los Angeles. The Mayor's Office of International Affairs is an example of how "champions" within local

government, in conjunction with institutionalization, are key in the implementation of policy goals.

ii. **Partnerships between and beyond Mayor's Offices**: While the L.A. Mayor's Office of International Affairs spearheaded the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals,[1] the process was a collaboration across various Mayor's offices (i.e., offices directly managed by designated deputy mayors), such as the Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity and Sustainability. Coordination across offices in the context of localization allowed for more intersectional approaches to sustainable development, such as development of projects with greater attention to housing security, opportunity youth, and restorative and racial justice and equity among others.

iii. **Creation of Civil + Human Rights and Equity Department (L.A. Civil Rights**): The City of Los Angeles under former Mayor Eric Garcetti created L.A. Civil Rights in the aftermath of nationwide protests sparked by the murder of George Floyd and broader calls to end police brutality. The department's mission is to "maintain and strengthen the city's diversity, equity, and accountability,"[2] and it works to coordinate efforts across commissions, and to engage meaningfully with community-based organizations and other local stakeholders to advance human rights. The department was created to enforce the Civil and Human Rights Law (Ord. 186084)[3] passed in 2019.

iv. **Creation of Gender Equity Coalition and gender toolkit:** L.A. was one of the first U.S. cities to support local implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Ord. 175735). Since 2004, L.A. has worked to advance its CEDAW commitments within its governance structures through the creation of a Mayor's Office gender equity toolkit[4] and the assignment of city department "gender equity liaisons" to address disparities in the workforce. The city, in partnership with Mount Saint Mary's University, also produces a "Report on the Status of Women and Girls in Los Angeles"[5] that provides in-depth analysis on gender inequalities city-wide.

b. Please provide information on the involvement of civil society, the private sector, academia, etc. in capacity building initiatives.

i. **Recurrent and substantive engagement of academic partners**: The City of Los Angeles, particularly the L.A. Mayor's Office, has worked very closely with academic stakeholders to advance global norms, such as those embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals. As partners, we have supported the work of the city through "Task Forces": student-driven, faculty-facilitated groups working on projects with agenda co-created by city 'clients' and academic institutions. City-academic partnerships in L.A.[6]

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[1] https://sdg.lacity.gov/about/sdgs-la

[2] https://civilandhumanrights.lacity.gov/about/mission

[3] https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2018/18-0086_ORD_186084_06-09-2019.pdf

[4] https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1wszqpmZnHMNe62AQSsi1omS2AMLcOy6nsAI9W7kzw_g/edit#slide=id.p1

[5] https://www.msmu.edu/learning-and-research-communities/center-for-the-advancement-of-women/events/status-of-women-and-girls/

[6] https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/11/6173

provide robust models of stakeholder engagement that has the potential to support and inform the work of local government in ways that align with human rights. In L.A., "Task Forces" have taken on many different forms and objectives, such as conducting community outreach and in-depth quantitative and qualitative research to help inform decision-making. These projects are themselves informed by our expertise as academics, which cover the application of human rights norms and standards to both the global and domestic concerns of the city of Los Angeles.

ii. **Partnerships with foundations**: L.A. City's work on localization has been supported by private sector actors, including the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and the Mayor's Fund for Los Angeles among others.

iii. **Participation in city network organizations**: L.A. City has participated actively in various city networks that provide resources for capacity building. L.A. has been a long-time active member of the Sister Cities International, but continues to forge and strengthen new connections with city networks such as C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group and the City Hub and Network for Gender Equity (CHANGE), the latter of which L.A. co-founded. Through CHANGE, Los Angeles has worked closely with representatives from other cities, including Bogotá, Colombia, to gather and implement best practices on how local governments can support and redistribute gendered care work and services, and combat gender-based violence. These networks provide opportunities for cities to exchange ideas on specific policy issue areas and build connections that allow for more long-term partnerships and peer-to-peer learning beyond issue silos.

c. Please provide information on any monitoring or evaluation mechanisms assessing the effectiveness of capacity building initiatives and their impact on the promotion and protection of human rights at the local level.

   As external, academic partners, we have a limited view of internal monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of the city's capacity building initiatives, and the impact these may have on human rights promotion and protection more broadly. However, we can speak to the following dimensions of our collaboration:

   i. **Task Force project evaluations:** Since 2018, the Mayor's Office of International Affairs has facilitated more than 160 students across 25 Task Forces. For each of those Task Forces, city representatives worked closely with faculty and students to evaluate project outputs through regular touchpoints and provide extensive feedback to ensure that projects can directly inform city-level action. These evaluations were qualitative, in-depth, and project-specific.

   ii. **Continued partnership with academic institutions:** That the city-academic partnership has endured not just five years, but a recent change in administration, is testament to the city's own evaluation of the value-add of continued engagement with universities and colleges. The most recent VLR (2021) states: "Our university partnerships are an engine for

translating the Global Goals into actionable projects that add value for the City, for the students and faculty engaged, and for our community."[7]

      iii. **Efforts to engage with civil society**: L.A. city continues to have stakeholder engagement as one of its priorities, and not just in the context of SDG localization. Engagement of civil society actors, including but not limited to academic institutions, can serve as a pillar in the city's effort to both build capacity in ways that are responsive to community needs, and to measure its impact in human rights protection and promotion. Again, stakeholder engagement is one of the key objectives of the creation of the Civil + Human Rights and Equity department.

2. What are the capacity building gaps and needs of local governments in relation to implementing/incorporating human rights at the local level?

    a. **Implication of duty bearer responsibilities for local government actors**: Drawing from findings of a 2018 Task Force on SDGs, human rights, and homelessness and work done around the "wicked problems" L.A. faces, while they recognize local policies can benefit from human rights based approach to governance, local government must first grapple with what it means to be "duty bearers" that are both connected to and independent of county, state, and national government.

    b. **More explicit incorporation of human rights in priority issue areas:** As noted previously, L.A. has made advances in realizing specific rights for some populations as they are embedded in efforts to advance gender equity and sustainable development initiatives. However, there remain many opportunities to foster better coordination and partnerships between local institutions mandated primarily with the implementation of human rights, other city departments such as those dealing with homelessness and sustainability within the city, and with human rights non-governmental organizations working locally. The latter point is essential; there remains space to better define the relationship between local government and civil society, and the ways NGOs in particular can complement and support city-driven efforts (and vice-versa).

    c. **Institutionalized mechanisms for more robust stakeholder engagement:** Local governments need more support in forming spaces or paths for productive, mutually beneficial engagement with community and civil society actors. While reports provide key insight on progress within and by local government, full realization of human rights within cities requires in-depth understanding of the needs and demands of the broader community, especially by those most underserved. There are also issues to be addressed with respect to improving the relationships, and engaging all the correct stakeholders, between the city and the county as they relate to human rights obligations, as well as the links or lack thereof with the state and federal level.

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[7] https://sdg.lacity.gov/our-work/voluntary-local-review

3. What measures are needed to further strengthen the capacity of local governments to implement/incorporate human rights at the local level?

   a. Local governments can work to strengthen their own capacity by:
      i. **Allocating resources to the creation and growth of offices/departments dedicated to human rights**: As with L.A., having a dedicated staff and resources allocated towards the implementation of human rights can help in the long-term anchoring of city-level policies and programs in a human rights framework.
      ii. **Building relationships with civil society and community stakeholders**: In addition to creating forums or spaces for stakeholder engagement, local governments can work to (re)build trust with community stakeholders.

   b. International human rights treaty bodies and practitioners can:
      i. **Aid in translation of human rights standards to the local level**: In addition to the issues around the responsibilities of duty bearers, existing international agreements within and beyond the human rights regime have been drafted by and for national governments. There is space for collaboration across human rights lawyers, scholars, and practitioners to explicitly address how human rights treaty obligations can be implemented at the most local level, as well as what relevant accountability mechanisms can look like.
      ii. **Provide clarity on implications for accountability of local governments vis à vis state and national governments**: Another dimension of translation is the actors involved. Among international actors, local governments are increasingly recognized as essential in the implementation of human rights. However, human rights obligations are not yet integrated across all levels of government, either for implementation or accountability. The question of accountability, and by extension monitoring and evaluation, are complicated by different institutional arrangements and mandates across levels of government. For example, in the context of L.A., public health and education (preschool and K-12) are managed at the county, and not the city level.

4. What are existing procedures and practices for engaging local governments in the work of the United Nations human rights mechanisms and in implementing, reporting and following up on relevant recommendations? How could the existing level of engagement be enhanced?

   a. The following are examples of voluntary reporting mechanisms and partnerships relevant to the implementation of human rights promotion and protection.
      i. **Creation of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) on the Sustainable Development Goals**: Beginning in 2018, L.A. has committed to localizing the Sustainable Development Goals, and in 2019 it produced its first VLR. While similar to the national counterpart in its voluntary nature, the creation of the VLRs has provided opportunities for stronger cross-department coordination, and a city-wide review of progress on priority issue areas in alignment with the SDGs. While the SDGs do not explicitly provide human rights

targets or indicators, understanding progress on various SDGs such as those on poverty, inequalities, and access to basic needs from food to health and education, have allowed the city to understand existing challenges in the implementation of sustainable development and human rights. In particular, disaggregated data available at the most local level shed light on patterns of discrimination and inequalities in the provision and access to healthcare along race and gender lines. VLR reporting is also one way that L.A. and other cities engage directly with the UN, through participation in the annual High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Studying VLRs across cities can help UN treaty bodies and human rights practitioners understand who key stakeholders are, what issues resonate, and how cities are approaching the translation of international agreements that were created by and for national governments.

ii. **Creation of the Report on the Status of Women and Girls in Los Angeles**: Tying into L.A.'s commitment to CEDAW, the report provides a snapshot of experiences of gender (in)equity, with the most recent report focusing on areas of economic security, home and family, and health. The report is not a direct evaluation of capacity building initiatives for gender equity, with the purpose of directly reporting to UN actors. However, it provides a useful baseline for city actors to identify gaps and strengthen existing institutions that can then guide engagement with UN human rights mechanisms.

iii. **Engagement with UN agencies**: L.A. has engaged with capacity building through the work of various UN agencies, including UN Habitat (e.g., on VLR development and localization processes).

iv. **(Beyond the United Nations)** Participation by local actors, including teams of government, academia and civil society, in **summits and forums**, such as the World Human Rights Cities Forum (Gwangju, Republic of Korea) and convenings by the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

b. On enhancing engagement with the United Nations:
   i. Strengthening role of local governments (i.e., authorities) as a key component of **Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS)** mechanism
   ii. Open space for CSOs who work on human rights at the local level to participate with all of the UN human rights mechanisms, including accreditation as needed
   iii. Develop a **participatory process** when defining the agenda for local governments around human rights, e.g., through the creation of an open working group to facilitate thematic and local level consultations, similar to the participatory process embodied by the 2030 Agenda
   iv. Strengthen **coordination across United Nations agencies and offices** that have engaged with local actors (e.g., UN Habitat, UNAIDS, UN DESA) to develop a standard for local government participation across UN spaces

5. What are the capacity building gaps and needs of local governments in relation to engaging with the United Nations human rights mechanisms and in implementing, reporting and following up on relevant recommendations?

    a. **Systematic reporting and review procedure for local governments**: There is not an existing standard for review of human rights implementation at the local level across treaty bodies, or other relevant mechanisms. Likewise, accreditation is an issue for groups who would have a lot to contribute and a lot to learn from these processes. Creating opportunities for systematizing local-level reporting can yield fruitful insight on the relationship between national and local level efforts.

    b. **Development of relevant toolkits or guides linking 2030 Agenda and human rights**: Resources on human rights mainstreaming for local governments, similar to existing guidance for national governments[8], can help facilitate engagement with UN human rights mechanisms, especially since there is already widespread and increasing buy-in of SDG localization.

6. What are the main challenges in your country in the promotion and protection of human rights at the local level?

    a. **The Limits to US Ratification**: The U.S. has yet to ratify most human rights treaties, and this continues to pose challenges in applying human rights norms and standards holistically, even at the most local level.

    b. **Complexity of jurisdictional arrangements**: As raised previously, the U.S. federal system provides both opportunities and challenges in advancing human rights at the local level. When seeking to make use of human rights norms and standards, even when addressing particular rights tied to specific issues, local actors may be faced with limited jurisdiction or ability to act.

    c. **Past injustices and the relationship between local government and civil society**: It is well recognized that human rights implementation must be responsive to and involve the voices of civil society actors. However, collaboration between state and civil society is difficult where there is distrust between local government actors and its constituents. Local governments must be able to acknowledge historical and systemic injustices within their own structures and promote transparency and accountability in their endeavors to advance human rights.

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[8] https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/sdgs/2030/2022-07-01/HRandVNRs_Guidance_Note2022.pdf

7. Please provide examples, good practices, challenges, and recommendations with regard to the above-mentioned issues.

    a. **Examples**: The efforts of the City of Los Angeles to link global challenges with local struggles offer useful lessons, especially with the given examples on **sustainable development** and **gender equity**.

    b. **Good practices**: The existing **model of city-academic partnerships** to support SDG localization provides key lessons for human rights realization and capacity-building even at the most local level. Over-burdened city actors may find it useful to work with academic partners, and for universities the ability to engage students in real-time work with tangible impacts is a win for everyone. Specifically, the model demonstrates the value in city governments' openness to and investment in forming collaborative relationships with local stakeholders.

    c. **Challenges**: There remains a need for greater attention to the roles and responsibilities of local government actors as **duty bearers both locally and in what this means for their actions at the global level**; there is a need for more expansive civil society **stakeholder engagement** beyond academic institutions but this requires long term investment to be successful, and **more explicit attention** to the value of human rights promotion and protection within and across issue areas.

    d. **Recommendations**:
        i. **Provide guidance on human rights and the 2030 Agenda for local governments:** There is space for the OHCHR to develop guidance on integrating human rights explicitly within existing international agreements that are undergoing processes of localization, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
        ii. **Facilitate forums and networking for local governments:** The OHCHR is also uniquely positioned to create spaces, much like the recent expert meeting, that can provide opportunities to local government and other local-level actors for knowledge exchange and the creation of partnerships.
        iii. **Bridge and engage with existing networks on human rights cities:** With the formation of the Geneva Cities Hub, there are opportunities to engage further with existing networks of human rights city practitioners and scholars, such as the U.S. Human Rights Cities Alliance, the "10, 100, 1000 Human Rights Cities and Territories by 2030" Campaign by UCLG, and Human Rights Cities Network among others. Connecting with existing human rights city networks can inform approaches to monitoring and evaluation as well as other resources for capacity building.