Cities Leading: Rethinking Global Governance

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On October 21-23, mayors from around the world, convened by the Global Parliament of Mayors, will gather virtually in Palermo to chart a path forward for leadership in the post-COVID era. They will be joined by international organizations, non-governmental organizations, universities, think tanks, industry, and other stakeholders. Participating mayors will debate critical policy points, share experiences and lessons, and identify key policy actions around five themes: Culture; Urban Pandemic Response; Global Governance; Cities, Urban Areas and Climate Migration; and Rethinking Urban Economies after COVID-19. This paper provides a policy brief and possible policy actions for the Global Governance theme.[1]

Overview

As identified in the New Urban Agenda, effective urban governance is a critical driver of sustainable development. Given the globalized nature of the planet's most pressing challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and migration, local leaders must not only work within their own cities, but also build partnerships with governmental and non-governmental actors at national, regional, and international levels. Managing these multilevel and multisectoral partnerships can strain municipal resources that are already stretched. However, these partnerships also offer new avenues for mayors to drive global initiatives and implement transformative change.

COVID-19 has demonstrated that mayors have unique expertise in developing and implementing local solutions with diverse stakeholders, as well as articulating the needs of their communities at national, regional, and international levels. There are, however, many barriers to effective urban governance. Local authorities often have limited legal or policy authorities to design and implement substantive change. Additionally, even prior to the pandemic, the budgets of many cities were in decline. This has been exacerbated by reduced tax revenue and additional expenditure during COVID-19, which has especially affected cities in the global south.[2] Cities have made significant progress in elevating their voice internationally, often through transnational city networks and initiatives such as the Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM). Yet, a 2019 global survey of 47 cities found that 78% of city officials saw inadequate

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[2] The OECD conducted a joint survey with the European Committee of the Regions about the impact of COVID-19 on subnational governments. They found 65% of respondents from large cities forecast a highly negative impact of the crisis on subnational finance.

funding as a barrier to city diplomacy.[3] This issue is also affecting city networks. According to a 2020 survey of 200 networks, 24% saw budgetary decreases in the last few years.[4]

Powered in large part by transnational city initiatives, cities have strengthened their multilateral governance processes. Through initiatives such as the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments and the Mayors Mechanism of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, cities are moving from outside advocates to institutional participants in major multilateral forums. They are no longer mere implementers of top-down policy decisions, but also leaders in global policy. Despite this progress, more needs to be done to advance the role of cities in global governance.

With the increasing role of urban governance in confronting global problems and crises, three key priority areas emerge for mayors: (i) reinforcing national-local collaboration, (ii) building global multi-stakeholder partnerships, and (iii) engaging with diverse stakeholders to enable an inclusive and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Policy Brief

Firstly, cities should seek to reinforce national-local collaboration to more effectively deliver public services, allow for more local autonomy, and identify local solutions to achieve national goals. The 2019 GPM "Resolution Empowering Cities to Cope with Global Challenges" noted forcefully that democratic governments should "allow cities and urban areas more freedom to act on systemic challenges." UN-Habitat and the African Centre for Cities have jointly noted the need for better interinstitutional hierarchy and coordination between national and local governments to optimize the delivery of public services while simultaneously recognizing a need for greater autonomy of local governments to allow the provision of decentralized services.[5] During the pandemic, dialogue between national governments and cities was crucial in early-stage national responses, and later in allowing decision-makers to integrate cities' needs in the design of legal and financial instruments at the national level.

Secondly, cities should build on their progress in establishing global partnerships to better coordinate the efforts of transnational city networks and enhance direct engagement with the private sector and international organizations. The GPM has previously observed that as more mayors and urban leaders participate in city networks, they increase their influence on global governance. Nevertheless, in the context of stretched resources at the municipal level, there is a need to maximize the impact of city efforts through coordination among networks. Furthermore, the GPM Durban Declaration pledged a closer partnership with elected city leaders and city networks in making, implementing, and enforcing global frameworks.

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[3] https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/report/conducting-city-diplomacy-survey-international-engagement-47-cities
[4] https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0042098020929261
[5] https://issuu.com/unhabitat/docs/towards_an_africa_urban_agenda_with

Additionally, cities have an opportunity for closer collaboration with the private sector and institutions, which remain an underutilized partner in global multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Lastly, COVID-19 has highlighted global interconnectedness and the need for global governance mechanisms that reinforce preparedness, resiliency, and crisis management. The pandemic has also underscored the need for mayors to ensure that the needs of vulnerable groups are prioritized in this planning. The economic and social crisis has often hit the most vulnerable the hardest. This highlights a need to adopt a more place-based and people-centered approach to urban governance and community engagement to ensure an inclusive recovery. In previous resolutions, the GPM has suggested that equity should be at the forefront of efforts to achieve the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. More should be done to close the gap in equity.

Recommended Local, National and International Policy Actions

The GPM is well equipped to advance, coordinate, and scale up the collective action of mayors and local leaders. Recommended policy actions, which target the international community, national governments, and local leaders and communities, include:

Enhancing national-local collaboration
- Mayors agree to seek opportunities to further utilize national city networks to advocate for enhanced local decision making in national policy and more effective multi-level governance.
- Mayors agree to lead by example through proactive adoption of agreements underpinning the 2030 Agenda and tools such as Voluntary Local Reviews.

Building global multi-stakeholder partnerships
- Building on examples such as the Mayors Migration Council's role on the UN Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund, mayors will seek opportunities through city networks for greater institutional involvement in intergovernmental forums, particularly those with a role in the distribution of municipal finance.
- Recognizing the interlinked nature of current major global challenges, mayors agree to advocate for greater collaboration between transnational city networks and for opportunities to pool resources and share expertise across networks.

Advancing inclusive urban governance
- Mayors commit to an inclusive recovery from COVID-19, adopting the principles and strategies advanced by the C40 Global Mayors COVID-19 Recovery Task Force, Mayors Migration Council Leadership Board and OECD Champion Mayors for Inclusive Growth. In pursuing these goals mayors will seek opportunities to promote inclusive growth and address inequality at local, national and international levels.

- Learning from COVID-19 response strategies, mayors will coordinate efforts to enhance access to services and safe public spaces, address affordability issues within local housing markets, increase local employment opportunities and work supports, and seek ways to engage residents who have borne the most severe socioeconomic impacts.