



## **Third UCLG World Forum of Intermediary Cities**

### **"Intermediary Cities Creating Territorial and Global Citizenship"**

**Cuenca, 23-24 January 2025**

Intermediary cities have taken great steps to position themselves as a collective of towns whose main characteristics are proximity of scale and governance, mass of cities they represent, and rural-urban linkages. The path we have taken has enabled us to start from a potential to be unlocked to implement the 2030 agenda, through the Chefchaouen Declaration in 2018, and then to demonstrate an unrivalled potential to ensure the planet's resilience, through our capability of transformation of models of development, as guardians of life systems, through the Kütahya Declaration in 2021.

Today, more than ever, trust in institutions must be reaffirmed as a fundamental pillar of a well-functioning society. However, in an era of increasing distrust and skepticism, restoring trust is a democratic imperative.

This unique characteristic of proximity in Intermediary Cities, participation and sense of community, facilitates the regeneration of trust at the grassroots level. Intermediary cities emerge as restorers of democratic value, promoting more inclusive, transparent and resilient management models.

Often needing to restore trust in moments of unrest, Intermediary Cities have been considered a key element to overcome anti-democratic aspects that may erode the major centers of power due to their governance of proximity and scale, and their ability to build trust with communities.

Building on the strengthened community of Intermediary Cities during the COVID-19 pandemic, guided by values of solidarity, responsibility, transparency, and service that define our century-old global movement, we, the leaders of Intermediary Cities, recognize the critical role of citizenship in fostering development and regeneration of local life in the post-COVID era. The current global context demands accelerated climate action and resilience for Intermediary Cities to sustain their vital role as guardians of life systems, in particular in view of the high ambitions needed from the COP30 in Belem.



Against a form of living that depletes our planetary resources, and that is proving to be unsustainable, the existence and actions of intermediary cities are improving the resilience capacity, rethinking what is valuable. Through our mass, Intermediary Cities collectively may become a fundamental place that leads the pathway towards a global policymaking for a locally empowered democracy, peaceful, socially just and ecologically resilient world, if the right enabling conditions are given to push the contextual thresholds.

**We, the intermediary cities of the world,**

gathered at the Third UCLG World Forum of Intermediary Cities in Cuenca on 23-24 January 2025, diverse in our representation yet unified in purpose,

**Believe that the collective agenda of the World Forum**, its added value in creating citizenships of wellbeing, and the governance of proximity that enshrines the rights of our communities and a fulfilling life is an opportunity against unrest, inequalities and to build peace. This understanding of wellbeing is not exclusive of the larger urban areas, but rather found within intermediary cities and their territories.

**Recognize that strategies developed in Intermediary Cities** like the municipality of Cuenca, as well as the Ecuadorian Declaration of Intermediary Cities, with the inclusion of citizens' security, climate change related agendas and finances, have been an inspiration to the results of this World Forum: with and through the participatory mechanisms generated by the municipalities:

- Citizenship in Intermediary Cities must be empowered to become territorial entrepreneurs of social and climate justice.
- Responsible citizenship involves exercising the right to fully support municipalities in their pursuit of socially and ecologically sustainable territories.
- Citizenship should actively be involved in the solution-making and policymaking processes within municipalities.

**Recognize the efforts and actions of local governments of intermediary cities and regional governments in environmental conservation and natural resources**, especially water, such as the results of the Popular Consultation of 2021 that vetoed indefinitely the exploitation of natural resources in water recharge areas developed by the municipality of Cuenca. Likewise, we urge the National Governments to respect these wills and to work jointly with the regional governments in the conservation of the environment, which is the future of everyone.

**We, the leaders and partners of Intermediary Cities, commit to creating enabling conditions** to achieve these objectives, by:



### 1. Strengthening a Citizenship-Centered Approach through a 'whole-of-Governance' systemic approach

- Ensuring the role of Intermediary Cities as guardians of life systems by fostering care and a culture of stewardship, enabling these cities to remain spaces of well-being and healthy living.
- Supporting international, national and regional governance to develop national policies and strategies through the governance centered on the citizenship and on the territories, opening the pathway for a "whole of governance" system: one single process that involves citizens and all spheres of government, gathering them all at the decision-making tables at all stages".
- Building global cooperation strategies through global multilevel mechanisms and institutions to enable a local effective response to global challenges, in particular the G20 working group on Intermediary Cities.

### 2. Building transformative territories and citizenship through the Caring of Life systems

- Implementing effective local responses to loss and damage by integrating the three Rio Conventions into a unified local agenda. Citizenship and territories experience the effects of climate change holistically, necessitating impactful and unified responses.
- Promoting collaborative planning with citizenship to enable the delivering of accurate community-driven responses.
- Developing territorial solidarity by a system of cities and local governments needs to be seen as competitive value
- Preserving and restoring the equilibrium between the rurality and the urban systems through enhancing rural-urban linkages towards a symbiotic relationship, through community engagement fighting against land degradation and drought.
- Fostering human mobility strengths through addressing population stabilization, service provision, environmental conservation, public service enhancement, and cultural and leisure opportunities, thereby mitigating "human desertification" and associated conflicts
- Empowering 0-kilometer food for a healthy and sustainable local life, through territorial participatory strategies, including local consumption and autonomous production, and building towards a "food social security" approach
- Accelerating the delivering of Social Climate Justice based on accessible funds to allow local capacity building and awareness raising on the need to preserve natural resources,

### 3. Basic Services as an innovative pathway for local development

- Leveraging technology, including artificial intelligence, to ensure food security and enhance service proximity, talent attraction, and support for displaced populations.
- Acknowledging the challenges posed by the arrival of high numbers of migrants, refugees and IDPs in ever-growing Intermediary Cities, and contributing to fostering safe and regular pathways to ensure these individuals' social and economic inclusion in the host cities.



- Prioritizing nature and health as integral components of basic services, ensuring the survival and vitality of Intermediary Cities as spaces of opportunity and quality of life.
- Acknowledging that territories need cities to provide essential services from rural to urban and from urban to rural. The National level of investment and innovation policies need to consider cohesion through the Intermediary Cities to fight insecurity, and build sustainable development and distribution of equal opportunities to leave no place behind.
- Integrating the cultural dimension of development into specific policies and programs on heritage, creativity and diversity that are accessible to all citizens; and also taking into consideration the local indigenous soft knowledge in the definition of the territorial public policies.
- Promoting national participatory and inclusive strategies for Intermediary Cities and their surrounding territories, to ensure the fight against inequalities is comprehensive and inclusive.

#### 4. Redefining a new nature of Development in Caring Economies

- Valuing key natural assets aligned with the Biodiversity Agenda to facilitate access to financing and management of the commons.
- Integrating Blue and Green Infrastructure (BGI) investments for Mitigation into future rural-urban planning to enable life systems' guardianship and support citizenship efforts.
- Lobbying for and changing the business as usual by new business models that align with the interest of nature and societies, and bring the commons at the heart of the caring economies.
- Offering conditions for making Intermediary Cities and their territory attractive environments to Youth and spaces in which people can develop their talent, generating equal opportunities.
- Regenerating forests as one of the key actions done at local level that connects the global challenges on commons, in the frame of the Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought agenda.

#### 5. Empowering Local Democracy through territorial entrepreneurs of social justice

- Transforming Intermediary Cities into a new model of territorial entities driven by empowered equality-driven citizenship that bridges governance levels, fostering a people-centered whole-of-governance system.
- Regenerating local democracy through the leadership of Intermediary Cities, connecting local action to global challenges, and fostering shared responsibility while asserting rights.
- Reestablishing local democracy and social justice through connections between local realities and broader governance structures.
- Encouraging life cycles systemic thinking that fosters collaboration between youth, older populations to address global challenges and shape sustainable futures for Intermediary Cities.
- Continue raising awareness for rights and responsibilities for the development of an equal empowerment and opportunity to all in Intermediary Cities.



- Acknowledging the need to empower women as a key component of local democracy and the sustainability of life systems.

We pledge to continue working as a network of networks, reflecting the diversity of voices of the international municipal movement articulated in the Global Taskforce; fostering partnerships within UCLG World Fora, and developing concrete actions supported by an Action Plan. These efforts will advance the orientations outlined above and lay the groundwork for the Fourth UCLG World Forum of Intermediary Cities.

With the support of the international community and our partners, we commit to pursuing an action-oriented agenda, like the UN-Habitat Urban-Rural Linkages (URL) and the G20 working group on intermediary cities. We will continue contributing to the UCLG Pact for the Future of Humanity, aligning with its three axes: People, Planet, and Government. The outcome of the World Forum is feeding the key political processes integral to ensuring the spaces in decision-making for local and regional governments. With the 4<sup>th</sup> Financing for Development Conference and the World Summit of Social Development taking place in 2025, we believe in the positioning of intermediary cities as part of the acquis of our movement to build a better tomorrow.