

# TOWARDS A GLOBAL FEMINIST MUNICIPAL MOVEMENT

Key Contributions of the Local and Regional Governments  
Constituency to the Generation Equality Forum



# CGLU MUJERES / UCLG WOMEN

## TOWARDS A GLOBAL FEMINIST MUNICIPAL MOVEMENT

Key Contributions of the Local and Regional Governments  
Constituency to the Generation Equality Forum

**“The transformation that will need to be brought about in our development model will only be possible if it responds to the dreams and expectations of citizens and communities, and if collective responsibility is taken to adjust and make compromises on a fair, equal and sustainable basis.”**

*(Preamble to the UCLG Durban Political Declaration<sup>1</sup>, 2019)*

This document falls within the framework of the All-UCLG Gender Equality Strategy and the World Organization’s participation mechanisms UCLG Women and the Standing Committee on Gender Equality.

The UCLG Gender Equality Strategy incorporates empowering women’s leadership, promoting women’s participation in decision-making processes, and ensuring that the different roles that women can play in development are increasingly recognized.

The Feminist Municipal Movement is about groundbreaking constructions around public power, its administrations and policies that are led, on the one hand by women politicians, and on the other, through bottom-up processes in local territories, by women’s and feminist networks and organizations. It is a new phenomenon, intrinsic to the 21st century, led by women with a particular role of women leaders who occupy municipal state structures, in partnership with those within party structures, in neighbourhoods, unions, human rights activists; and in the intersections that traverse them all. It is by no means a homogeneous, univocal construction, but rather the interweaving of diverse partnerships, where all generations of women — from the youngest to those with vast trajectories and experiences — are accommodated; and progress is made on the

---

<sup>1</sup> The Durban Political Declaration, adopted by local elected officials at the World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders in Durban, builds on the work of the UCLG constituency, as well as on a strong vision for the future of the international municipal movement for the 21st century. Agreed in Durban from 11 to 15 November 2019, building on the century-old municipal movement.

basis of diverse strategies and methodologies, which need to be understood, shared and reflected upon.

It is about constructing a path by which to address the contexts of global health and economic crises such as the ones we are currently experiencing, as well as the rise of conservatism and fundamentalism in contemporary society. Institutional processes led by women, which are progressively emerging in the local territories across the various continents of our world. It is precisely in this connection between municipalist political platforms and women's movements and organizations that groundbreaking configurations emerge, and are debated and consolidated.

**“This transformative municipalism that we are promoting in many cities around the world is a feminist construction, considering it is defined as “creating communities that cooperate in a network to defend the commons and fight against social inequalities.”**

**Ada Colau, Mayor of Barcelona,**

*UCLG Special Envoy to the United Nations and for the 2030 Agenda*

Municipalism and feminist movements coincide in their critique of the traditional and hegemonic institutions and modalities that currently predominate in the spheres of social, political and economic life. It is through a new municipalism that women politicians and feminists have burst onto the scene, driving new ways of conceiving the state, relationships and the exercise of power, the administration and public policy, unveiling new narratives and practices.

**“The personal is political”**

is one of feminism's most powerful theoretical and political contributions, in its ability to provide visibility to the relationships that are built in the micro-space, in everyday life. Thus, the public and the private are spaces of tensions and conflicts from which it is possible to understand how being women and being men result in situations of inequity that are socially and historically constructed.

The 21st century unearths women in all their diversity — migrants, workers, those in precarious situations, academics, students, heads of households, women forming part of the LGBTBIQ+ community, of different ethnicities and religions, and women in political leadership positions, among many others — as new and powerful political subjects.

Coming out in their masses in the streets to call for change, through mobilizations, they constantly provoke a reconfiguration of the public sphere by raising old/new issues, such as violence, care and its contribution to development, political participation and decision-making spaces, as well as the implementation of initiatives that enable them to move forwards in effectively exercising their rights as citizens, and thus, in more democratic and inclusive societies.

The Feminist Municipal Movement is based on three central pillars: the institutional framework; women leaders as key actors in the process; and the innovative agendas inspired by their efforts.

### **(i) The institutional dimension:**

This refers to the existence of an institutional framework that fosters and facilitates the construction of this development of the Feminist Municipal Movement. There are precedents that have contributed to consolidating this new narrative and — not only that — there are also and decisively international instruments that support local action; from those that foster commitments such as the SDGs, to the New Urban Agenda, and those that are binding such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); and many others that were constructed through agreements not exempt from tensions in recent decades. In the process of developing these agreements, progress was made in the recognition of women as subjects of rights and policies, in the understanding that they are producers of wealth, providers of services, dedicate time and undertake work, that they constitute talent and hold capacities that development cannot afford to lose. Within this framework, the potent statement “leaving no one behind” is drawn upon, strongly linked to Women’s Right to the City as a powerful concept, yet one that is also relatively new and complex, since it encompasses all rights: civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights still to be fully conquered by women.

### **(ii) Women’s leadership:**

This Feminist Municipal Movement is based on the leadership of women who, although all diverse, possess a particular shared characteristic that marks their approach. Women are advancing — yet not without great difficulties — within local governments under various strategies, perhaps the most powerful of which is in occupying leadership positions. And in these breakthroughs, many of them promote a resounding transformation of the concept of politics as a masculine sphere, questioning the hegemonic patriarchal leadership

of political positions, which has significant costs, even in their personal lives. It is of interest here to understand the obstacles that still persist in terms of their political autonomy, and to explore further, in particular with those women who have acceded to municipal power and who have fostered this dimension of transformation in the practices of the exercise of power, of the administrations and of the public policies developed within local councils.

### **(iii) An innovative agenda:**

An agenda that blurs the classic distinction between the public and the private by placing the sustainability of life at the heart of public management. Beyond differences, progress is being made, and the diverse voices of women have raised new issues in their cities, in public spaces. Old/new public questions, such as violence against the body, the first territory inhabited by women; care as a right; or the need for alternative, more plural economies that support economic autonomy and the transfer of income. In addition, the issues that refer to the city understood as a common good of our societies and of women; the necessary participation of women's voices in the definition of the public; the central cultural transformations when it comes to building diverse and respectful societies; and driving increased environmental justice, among others.

The Feminist Municipal Movement not only refers to women, but to generating and consolidating contributions towards a local society that needs more democratic transformations. Contributions to conceive a municipal movement with public interventions that would transform the stereotypes and traditions present in the local territories.

## **THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE FEMINIST MUNICIPAL MOVEMENT:**

- Place people at the centre of local management through the redefinition of care work, care workers and carers.
- Advocate for gender equality and the rights of women and their diverse intersections, ethnicities, sexual identities, abilities, ages, countries of origin,

religions, and so many other factors.

- The incorporation of women's voices – polyphonic, all of them different – into the public policy cycle and local decision-making processes.
- The social inclusion of those facing situations of greater inequalities and the non-exclusion of the LGBTQ+ population.
- The Right to the City. A city that is accessible, safe, inclusive and friendly towards women and historically excluded groups, including migrant and displaced populations.
- Generate channels and links for the active and organized participation of the population, particularly women.
- Generate and support mechanisms for increased collaboration and recover the active social fabric in the communities and neighbourhoods within cities.
- Care for the environment as heritage of present and future life.
- Gender-sensitive resource management and budgeting.
- Contribute to consolidating and giving a voice to networks, thus facilitating social, territorial, regional and international cohesion.

Some tendencies become apparent in this path towards the construction of a feminist municipalism. On the other hand, a series of questions are raised on which further reflection is needed.

**“I came from a family where a woman's voice is powerful. All women in our family are achievers. That's why I first questioned why women belonged to marginalized sectors.(...) Being the first woman mayor in our city, I experienced gender prejudice and I had to prove them wrong.”**

**Madelaine Alfelora, Mayor of Iriga,**  
*UCLG Treasurer*

## **KEY POINTS:**

The construction of a particular and compelling agenda by the group of actresses and actors that constitute this Feminist Municipal Movement requires collective processes devised from the bottom-up, nourished by leadership practices and policies, drawing

on the lessons and learning experiences that have been obtained. However, we can outline some of the dimensions that have already been agreed upon, on which we need to move forward. It is about the construction of and consensus around a common agenda of critical points, beyond the differential scope that each of these points may have according to the specificities of the socio-historical, cultural, political and economic contexts of the local territories. Bearing in mind that the order expressed does not imply the prevalence of one over the other; all should be understood in terms of integrality.

Mapping women in the territories is a priority. Identifying the diversity of women and their specific problems, needs and opportunities in order to offer inclusive and coherent responses to address the reality of each group, each neighbourhood and each social strata. Especially in the context of the current pandemic, which has impacted people very differently, local responses and public policies cannot be neutral.

**“Towards the recovery and in the pandemic aftermath, women must occupy their rightful place. For that reason, we have launched a call to action, of “Women’s Leadership for the Post COVID-19 Era”. Our leading role is crucial to driving us to inclusive and resilient cities, to cities that care about its people, without leaving anyone behind.”**

**Thembisile Nkadameng, Mayor of Polokwane,**

*President of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), Co-President of UCLG*

It is also central to local action to understand socio-demographic transformations, which refer to the type of households, number of dependants, according to the income scale in each territorial situation where the population lives, together with indexes of overcrowding, income, services, etc. Women are not equal; they are traversed by diverse differences: economic, social, ethnic, racial, identity, sexual, age, territorial circumstances, the places where they live, income conditions, and others. Yet all share an equal need and demand for public and community services.



Promote **campaigns for the prevention of gender-based violence** and offer effective protection to victims. Zero tolerance for the aggressions against women that we have become used to, such as street harassment and gender stereotyping within the local public administrations themselves.



Open up **spaces for the consultation and participation of women**. If the local sphere has one advantage, it is that it makes social participation more feasible. It is a highly valuable opportunity to bring different views and voices to the development of public policies, and women must be present. Women make up half of the population, therefore their interests and contributions must be part of the decision-making process. Much more so in the context of this profound crisis, from which we will not emerge without women.



Economic recovery is, together with overcoming the health emergency, the greatest challenge at present. In order for us to aspire to local economic development, it is key to create **jobs for women and young people**. In this sense, local and regional governments have a great opportunity to bring the business sector to the table and determine permits, tenders and tax incentives, creating sources of employment and quotas that ensure the hiring of women. Along these lines, training and financing opportunities to support women's entrepreneurship could also be provided.



The return to a **"new normality" must be an opportunity to rebuild more liveable and human cities** whose territorial planning and public services facilitate the spatio-temporal organization of work and the domestic and social life of individuals and families. Public transport, lighting, public safety, green and recreational spaces, and services of proximity, among others, are key to the quality of access to and enjoyment of the Right to the City.



One lesson to be learnt from this pandemic is the **value of care**. But we cannot place this responsibility on the shoulders of women alone. It must be a shared co-responsibility. And this goes beyond pacts within families. Co-responsibility in care must be a social pact, a pact in which all stakeholders take responsibility. Local governments, within their competencies, are challenged to create caring cities. And they can do so through the expansion and extension of services such as childcare facilities, nursing homes, programmes for dependants. But also by caring for those who care: creating employment programmes for the care of dependants, providing relief to support rest and leisure time for those who care, promoting campaigns for co-responsibility in the home.



It is important to recognize the leadership of local governments in driving forward gender equality which, in the context of recovery from this crisis, can play a decisive role in the creation of a "new normality" in which women are invited to the decision-making table on an equal footing, **recognizing their diversity and intersectionality**, so that their specific



needs and interests as women can finally be included in local agendas and public policies.

## KEY QUESTIONS:

- How can we promote **greater empowerment** of women and the increased political participation of women in decision-making spaces in order to move towards parity democracy?
- How can we build **alternative institutional structures**, with transformative power, that place citizenship as a right at the centre of daily life?
- How can we create inclusive cities that guarantee the **rights of women and diversity**, as proposed in the framework of the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda, and go beyond these visions?
- How can we **promote care** and self-care as rights, understanding that care infrastructures can be redistribution instruments in cities and territories?
- How can we create channels for **effective and inclusive participation** that incorporate the voices of women and diversity in the construction of public policies?

**“We cannot exclude half of the world’s population from political decision-making. We know that equality brings added value to policy development, and we are determined to bring about the change in mindset that is needed to achieve it.”**

**Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris,**

*Co-President of UCLG and President of UCLG Standing Committee on Gender Equality*

- How can a **new organizational culture** be constructed, with a more participatory nature that allows gender mainstreaming to permeate across public administration and policies?
- How can **public resources** be leveraged to foster these constructions from a feminist perspective?
- How can we ensure that these **local constructions** of new ways of conceiving and exercising power and public management that emerge at

the local level have a **global impact**?

- What are the best **tools to strengthen inclusive and democratic societies** that respect human rights in contexts of economic inequalities, where the richest 1% of the population possesses more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people; and where the 22 richest men in the world have more wealth than all the women in Africa combined?
- How can we ensure that **digitalization** does not overburden women, and at the same time, how can we ensure that we bridge the gap between women and men?

**“The pandemic, climate change and many other challenges have shown that what the world needs to face them is empathy, solidarity, collective action, intelligence and the ability to work in multidisciplinary teams - it is difficult to find another way to describe any woman in the world.”**

**Claudia Lopez, Mayor of Bogota,**  
UCLG Policy Councillor

The work of United Cities and Local Governments is guided by a Pact for the Future that is feminist, that amplifies the voices of women leaders and enables the links with and among grassroots women’s networks, feminist women and men, and professionals to be strengthened, in order to develop a feminist social contract with girls and boys, men and women, empowered equally for the benefit of all people, the planet, and by governments.

*With the finance support of:*



EUROPEAN UNION

*“This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union”*



*“This document has been financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida. Sida does not necessarily share the views expressed in this material. Responsibility for its content rests entirely with the author.”*