Training-of-Trainers on the Toolkit for Urban Inclusion: Access to Information and Public Participation, 28 - 29 September 2021

The African Academy of Local Government (ALGA) of UCLG Africa has identified Training of Trainers and multipliers as a priority. Together with ALGA and the UNESCO Regional Bureau for sciences in the Arab States – Cairo, the International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels designed a training for human resource managers, staff trainers, human rights trainers and human rights education multipliers with the aim of creating a pool of trainers on the principle to "Leave No One Behind".

The workshop series consists of two two-day workshops, focussing on two topics of high relevance to African cities each. This second Training-of-Trainers workshop focussed on access to information and public participation. It followed a human rights-based approach and used the Toolkit for Urban Inclusion as a training tool. The toolkit is created by cities for cities and promotes a human rights-based approach to local policy making. It can be used by multipliers at training events for various target audiences. The Training-of-Trainers workshop presented the background, methodology and practical application of the toolkit.

The two-day workshop was attended by participants from all African regions. Presentations included key elements of human rights and a HRBA; local government, good governance and human rights; principles of human rights education and training; and the Toolkit methodology. Experiences of cities with the creation and application of the toolkit for urban inclusion in Arab cities were presented. The toolkit chapters on access to information and public participation were presented in detail.

In moderated exchange sessions, the participants discussed concepts, arguments, and evidence backing access to information and public participation programmes and policies. Participants identified the target groups of their capacity building efforts in a home assignment. The majority usually works with elected officials, civil servants and human resource managers. The rest usually trains NGOs, students and the general public.

Together, participants analysed the implementation of a human rights-based approach in all phases of the policy cycle. Starting from their own experiences with access to information and public participation programmes and policies, participants learnt to transfer the toolkit to their own context, and they were equipped with additional tools for local application. Participants exchanged on solutions to challenges, identified by various cities and were thus empowered to use the toolkit in trainings with their target group.

The workshop was interpreted into three languages (English, French, Arabic) to ensure inclusiveness. To enhance accessibility and to celebrate the International Day for Universal Access to Information (28 September), the webinar was broadcasted live on Facebook. The evaluations of the workshop were very favourable and almost all participants expressed their interest to be included in a trainer pool of ALGA to promote a human rights-based approach.

This report outlines the results of the discussions from the webinar.

Participants identified access to information as an essential enabler of urban inclusion and a prerequisite for effective public participation. Access to information and public participation both contribute to the achievement of human rights principles, notably transparency, accountability, and participation. They have also been recognized as contributing to an inclusive post-conflict recovery and conflict transformation. Public participation allows local authorities to closely identify the priorities and needs of different groups of inhabitants and to tailor their measures accordingly. In some countries, decentralization laws require citizen participation and meetings of the municipal authorities need to be open to the public.

Participants identified access to information and public participation as two sides of the same coin and coined local governments as 'the embodiment of human rights principles' and as responsible to provide access to information and to respond to the needs of inhabitants through adequate measures. The African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development was highlighted as an instrument that reflects this intrinsic link. Participants regretted that his instrument is nor yet widely ratified and exchanged views on the roles and responsibilities of all levels of government for the protection and promotion of human rights.

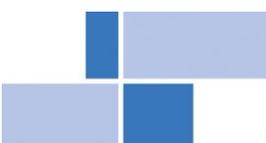### *Challenges and Solutions in Relation to Access to Information and Public Participation*

Literacy

Adult illiteracy rates remain very high in some African countries, hampering access to information and consequently the informed participation in public affairs. Literacy programs and non-formal education was regarded a factor promoting public participation and access to information. Participants suggested investment in voluntary work as a solution. In an example from Central African Republic, volunteer groups of young people were formed at the district level. Volunteers receive information and convey it to the older (illiterate) population in their neighbourhood. It was suggested that students from Universities should be empowered to contribute to the education of their families, or neighbourhoods. Participants concluded that investing in literacy programs is an investment into access to information and an enabler for public participation.

Municipalities in Africa also rely on audio-visual media to convey information. This was considered more inclusive by participants. To give the majority access to information, local authorities host interactive radio broadcasts and TV shows, also in local languages. The radio remains the most important media to convey information in remote and less affluent communities. Moreover, vehicles with loudspeakers can broadcast information in remote or disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In more developed areas, smart phones and smart phone apps are popular tools to disseminate information and enable participation of the population. Again, it was suggested to mobilize young people for support with using those tools.

Connectivity

The benefits of modern communication tools and IT to enhance access to information and participate in the conduct of public affairs was universally praised. However, access to the internet is far from universal in Africa, as is the availability of devices. In some areas, even municipalities have no computer or only one, and smart phones remain a luxury item. Thus, neither the civil servants can partake in online capacity building efforts to educated themselves on the relevance of public participation and tools to achieve it. It has been identified as a good practice to set up one room that is also accessible for the public with some computers and internet access, but

participants acknowledged that there are not enough resources in many municipalities to do so. Investing in VSAT was named as one approach by big donors to enhance connectivity in Africa.

Reaching communities (Inclusiveness)

Participants agreed that the smallest organisational units (districts, chiefdoms) are best suited to engage the maximum number of people.

Thus, some local authorities have set up consultation frameworks bringing together the different categories of actors to discuss various subjects. Such consultations may result in community development plans or similar commitments. Some communities hold regular information and feedback meetings at district level and/or have citizens bureaus that connect the population and the administration. In CAR, so-called urban security committees gather information and forward it to the municipal level where the information is vetted and brought to the attention of the central government. Participants highlighted the role of traditional and religious structures in that respect. It was highlighted that the use of local languages is paramount to leave no-one behind. However, it was acknowledged that all organizational units, be it political, traditional or religious, have internal power structures and this bears the risk that the voices of the marginalized and most vulnerable remain unheard. Setting up structures that specifically enable the participation of vulnerable groups (e.g. women councils) were regarded a potential solution to this. It was shared as a challenge that people oftentimes expect incentives and remuneration if they participate in meetings and partake in public affairs.

Accountability

Participants discussed fiscal accountability and participation as a means to build the trust of the population in local authorities. Participatory budgeting was quoted as one established means to that end. Participants shared examples of budget consultation meetings and accountability sessions on the budget as established practices. In Mutare (Zimbabwe), a budget committee comprised of 13 citizens (business people, teacher, etc.) is drawing up the budget together with the administration.

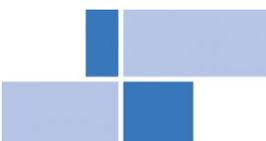### Using the toolkit for urban inclusion

Participants found the toolkit for urban inclusion to be useful if it is adapted to their local contexts. They suggested to evaluate existing projects and efforts to enhance public participation and access to information. Thereby, the toolkit could be used as benchmark. Moreover, the design of pilot projects in municipalities with the help of the toolkit was suggested by participants. The toolkit can also be used to raise awareness on the various topics and their relevance. In terms of the further proceeding to disseminate the Toolkit, UCLG ALGA invited all participants to share the toolkit with their respective assembly of local authorities.

Resources:

- The toolkit for urban inclusion in Arab cities: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374629 (available in English, French and Arabic)
- Word cloud: Human rights are…?

Presentations:

- Key elements of human rights and the HRBA (Bernadette Holzer)
- Local government, good governance and human rights (Bernadette Holzer)
- Principles of human rights education and training (Bernadette Holzer)
- The toolkit methodology (Isabella Meier)
- By cities for cities (Abdelaziz Zaki)

- The toolkit and the policy cycle (Heba Sharma)
- The toolkit on access to information (Marwa Barakat)
- The toolkit on public participation (Marwa Barakat)