



UCLG Committee
on Social Inclusion,
Participatory Democracy
and Human Rights



UCLG
United Cities
and Local Governments



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Ecological transition in popular peripheries: a priority in the fight against social inequalities

With

- Stéphane Troussel, President of the Seine-Saint-Denis Departmental Council, Co-president of the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights
- Abdoulaye Thimbo, Mayor of Pikine (periphery of Dakar)
- Jorge Enrique Rojas, Secretary for Social Development of Bogota
- Lorza Zarate, President of the Habitat International Coalition
- Emilia Saiz, UCLG Deputy Secretary General

Moderated by Magali Fricaudet, Coordinator of the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights.

Tuesday, 8th December 2015, at the COP21 venue, a debate gathering elected officials of peripheries and territorial communities from all over the world pointed the ecological transition as a lever to solve social and economic inequalities too.

Peripheries are forgotten in major negotiations on climate, whereas they act as solutions lab

On 8th December 2015, on the occasion of a roundtable organised in the UN area at the COP21 venue, many elected officials, gathered by the Seine-Saint-Denis Departmental

Council and UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, shared a very similar diagnosis. Each in their own way, they confirmed a certain abandon of local governments by national and international spheres, and highlighted the relevance of an actual transition in these territories instead. Indeed, peripheral territories, often divided from urban centres, are more vulnerable to climate change's effects: houses are usually less isolated and their consumption is higher; inhabitants are more often victims of the effects of noise pollution due to the acoustic effects of the roadways close to the peripheries' inhabitants' houses. In addition, and contrary to the richer neighbourhoods' people, they usually do not have alternative solutions in case of disasters –this was especially evident during New Orleans floods.

Additionally, the issue of the accelerated urbanization and lack of services and access to resources is creating new conflicts –especially in the South, where the urban growth annual rate is increasingly fast.

Stéphane Troussel, President of the Seine-Saint-Denis Departmental Council, which hosts the COP21, insisted on the double benefit that a fight against climate change in peripheries would have. “The ecological transition must concern everyone, especially the peripheries – because the tools for the ecological transition (more mobility, less energy poverty) are also tools to fight social and economic inequalities. Ultimately, it would become a virtuous circle.”



Local Governments from peripheral cities are implementing concrete solutions to conciliate the fight against climate change and social inclusion

These thoughts were shared by the rest of the roundtable's participants. **Jorge Enrique Rojas**, Secretary for Social Inclusion of Bogota, Colombia, highlighted the urgency of the issue: “local governments are already working to reduce climate change's effects, whereas States are still discussing what to do”, he said. In Bogota, the city hall linked, in its

development plan, the issues of urban segregation and climate change. According to Enrique Rojas, one of the main challenges to meet social and climate needs is the recovery of the commons (water, energy, transports, waste management) face to economic powers. **Social and climate justice are intrinsically linked.**

For his part, **Abdoulaye Thimbo, Mayor of Pikine, Dakar's** main peripheral city, also confirmed a disparity between centre and periphery. "Ultimately, a peripheral city like Pikine lacks of good consideration, even if it has 1.5 million inhabitants", he said, taking as an example the frequent floods the city (built on informal habitat) is victim of. "The problem is that these settlements, which were built during the 80's massive rural exodus, have not been accompanied by an urbanistic plan worthy of this name. As a result, our inhabitants directly suffer climate change in the form of floods."

The city of Pikine, which has part of its territory in the Mbao forest, also accompanies its women producers towards a sustainable economy by helping them in transformation and structuration within the Pikine's Women Network, in order to strengthen their activities and help them to access to markets.

Abdoulaye Thimbo concluded his speech by **calling for the green fund created by the COP21 agreement to be accessible for all cities**, which have to face diverse problems to conciliate a fast expansion process with ecological issues (deforestation, informal housing, services and infrastructure deficit).



Lorena Zarate, civil society representative as **President of the Habitat International Coalition (HIC)**, took as example her hometown, Mexico, where peripheral areas have cumulated more than 5 million empty houses in 12 years. "This is very worrying, as it is very negative both in terms of housing policy and in environmental terms –because these settlements' construction generated a deforestation that has become useless", she highlighted.

However, local representatives are not giving it up. **Stéphane Troussel pointed out three sectors in which the ecological transition demanded by peripheries may be implemented: transports, housing, thermal renewal and the fight for employment.** Regarding the last one, he highlighted the Department's raise-awareness activity on the new employment opportunities linked to the environmental sector. For instance, last 10th November, the "Green Employment Forum", organized by the Department attracted more than 7.000 young people.

Jorge Enrique Rojas went back over the issue of transports, making a strong defence of the new Bogota subway –designed to interconnect this 8 million people city. Abdoulaye Thimbo highlighted the work for social inclusion developed from an environmental perspective: for several years, Pikine municipality helps women far from labour market to find a job in the Mbao forest, where they specialize in employments linked to fruit and vegetable production and to fishing.

COP 21 and Habitat III should start from the territories and not only states

Despite all these good actions, do local governments have a real chance to get their voice listened in COP21? Regarding this question, answers diverged a little. Lorena Zarate stated that "neither civil society nor local governments are represented among the signatories of the final document". Rojas called for keeping progressing without waiting for States to be ready to act. Finally, Stéphane Troussel wanted to be optimist and realistic at the same time: "we need to understand that this COP is not only a challenge for negotiations between States, but also that the voice of the most popular territories is needed there. In addition, I think that we are moving in the right direction when we see that the Grand Paris Express project, which by 2024 will be giving service to north-eastern Parisian cities, has prevailed over the option of a new high-speed line that would only help the "happy few" to gain some minutes.

To conclude, **Emilia Saiz, Deputy Secretary General of UCLG** –which contributes to bring local and regional governments' voice to international negotiations-, invited present communities to keep mobilizing to bring the issue of fair, democratic and sustainable metropolitan areas to the Habitat III Conference, which will gather UN member States in Quito on October 2016. "This Agenda", she said, "must be for territories, not only the States".

Gradually, peripheries are getting their voice heard on the long process of the ecological transition, as necessary voice in a world that, according to the UN, will be 70% urban by 2050.