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Discussion Highlights:

LOCAL INNOVATION FOR GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

25 June, 2014, Palau Robert, Barcelona

A discussion on **LOCAL INNOVATION FOR GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES** was convened by **World Council of Peoples for the United Nations (WCPUN)** in partnership with the **Office of Economic Growth, Area of Economy, Enterprise and Employment, of the Barcelona City Council**.

Designed to provide a glimpse into the activities and insights of various institutions and individuals engaged in sustainable development related issues, the meeting featured remarks by **Mr. Josep Piqué**, CEO, Office of Economic Growth, Barcelona City Council; **Mr. Jeffery Huffines**, Chair, 65th Annual United Nations DPI/NGO Conference; **Ms. Alessandra Sensi**, Senior Programme Officer, Union for the Mediterranean; **Ms. Maíta Fernandez-Armesto**, Senior Programme Management Coordinator, City Resilience, UN Habitat; **Mr. Stavros Chatzipanagiotou**, Head of Communications and Stakeholder Relations, Fusion For Energy; **Mr. Albert Campi**, Vice-President Eco-Entrepreneurs and Founder, NaRural Energy; **Mr. Ramon Llonch**, Founder, Artlantique; **Ms. Susana Martín Belmonte**, Founder, Instituto de Moneda Social; **Mr. Pranay Krishen**, Founder, EcoSwarm; **Mr. Alexis Fasoli**, Artisan and Trustee, Inka Tinka; and was moderated by **Ms. Shamina de Gonzaga**, Director WCPUN and Editor-in-Chief, Centerpoint Now.

Following are conclusions and recommendations that emerged throughout the presentations and discussion and that were submitted to the 65th Annual United Nations DPI/NGO Conference:

Resilience and Sustainability at the Regional and Local Levels

In addition to global efforts, regional and local strategies for adapting to climate change, fostering resilience, and enabling partnerships are also essential.

Cross-sector partnerships serve to gather knowledge and develop solutions that are out of reach of any one sector on its own. We should focus on creating central points / market places to connect challenges with people solving them. New collaborative initiatives require developing trust.

Internet based platforms can foment coherence in the area of sustainability and enable people with common interests to learn from others working in similar fields in other parts of the world.

Specialized mechanisms (example of EcoSwarm) are being harnessed to flip the dominant social networking model and make it functional for collaboration, overlaying content with the geographic spectrum.

At the city level, such as in Barcelona, local authorities are collaborating with researchers and SMEs to promote innovation and address the city's needs.

Every city has its own challenges. The UN HABITAT City Resilience Profiling tool, which is specially adapted to each city, has developed mechanisms to measure actions and track changes. Training programmes exist under the UN HABITAT umbrella. People need to be informed about them so they can have access to resilience action plans, and understand not just the scope of challenges, but also how to properly respond to them.

At the regional level in the Mediterranean, countries have only recently focused on regional responses to climate change, under the umbrella of the recently formed intergovernmental organization, Union for the Mediterranean (UFM). Focused on increasing regional integration and cohesion, the UFM is also engaged in promoting partnerships with socially responsible companies and in helping to provide access to financing for exemplary private sector activities in green industries.

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To meet the increasing demand for energy, Fusion is a promising technology, proving to be a clean, abundant, safe energy, which can be used at an industrial scale and easily stored. Based on the current level of investment however, it can only become industrially available by 2055. Sustainable energy for all could be a reality much sooner with increased investment and political will. Fusion4Energy is the organization pioneering these developments at the EU level.

Innovative approaches that presently exist to supply renewable energy to remote rural farmers, include online communities. The community's needs determine the direction and actions taken (NaRural Energy is an example).

Storage is a challenge for renewable energies. While pushing all countries to adopt sustainable energy, it is important to recall that industrialized countries employed unsustainable, environmentally damaging strategies in order to achieve their goals.

Fostering Sustainable Consumption and Production

It is important to recognize the correlation between environmental degradation and the negative impact on people's livelihoods – such as for the fishing industry, especially in developing countries.

Upcycling of discarded materials (such as fishing boats/ example of Artlanticque in Senegal) can be a viable strategy to foster sustainable consumption and production, as well as develop training and employment opportunities.

Support is needed to introduce sustainable products into a market dominated by mass production. Prototypes that are working could be replicated/adapted at the local level; collaboration is needed from bigger groups that can provide the appropriate channels. (Platforms such as InkaTinka are an example of enabling models to be shared across borders with profits getting reinvested in community).

For small entrepreneurs, it is often costly and cumbersome to become more socially and environmentally sustainable.

Efforts need to be made to educate both consumers and producers about ways to become more "sustainable."

The information and tools should be easily accessible. Spending money is a privilege. Action is needed to generate mainstream consumer demand for sustainable products and to make the system work for small-scale producers and address the ability of large companies to monopolize the sale of primary products.

Numerous certification processes for sustainable products have been corrupted. There is a need for certification platforms that are not subject to the influence of private funding.

Sustainable products and positive innovation needs to be marketed in ways that make them attractive, not by scaring people or reprimanding them; but by showcasing what cool things can be done with them.

The need to attract investors implies the need to ensure return on investment.

We need to develop incentives linked to the priorities of society.

Innovation exists, but is hindered by institutional resistance and the imbalance between the financing available to certain interest groups and the financing available to progressive alternatives.

Numerous platforms for socially responsible companies exist and should serve as catalysts to position sustainability high on political, social, and economic agendas (in Barcelona, EcoEmprenedors is an example).

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Rethinking the “Economic growth imperative”

The political imperative of economic growth has trapped politicians. We are accustomed to hearing that our economies should grow, as though that were something natural, but actually it is not always natural or desirable. Most money in circulation is credit/debt. The current monetary system requires constant sources of new credit and results in the misallocation of resources, as exemplified by the dramatic property bubble in Spain, which generated millions of empty houses and permanent losses for investors.

It is counterproductive to try to enforce sustainable development goals into a model that is systemically unsustainable. Governments and banks should admit that the current monetary system is systemically designed to be unsustainable.

Complementary currencies created by and for people, can provide viable alternatives. The 80-year old Swiss WIR system is an example. SMEs, city councils, local governments can decide to utilize these. The challenge is not just about material scarcity, but also a crisis of ethics. At present, the aim is to achieve “zero-based targets” (unlike the Millennium Development Goals which only aimed to halve extreme poverty). The 65th Annual DPI/NGO Conference is calling for a transition to people-centered development for the post-2015 development agenda.

The UN could promote sustainable alternatives, like complementary currencies. (Entities like the Instituto de Moneda Social provide insight and analysis.)

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For more information:

<http://www.barcelonactiva.cat>

<http://outreach.un.org/ngorelations/conference-2014/>

UFMSecretariat.org

<http://fusionforenergy.europa.eu>

Ecoemprenedors.cat

Artlambique.com

<http://www.nadaestaperdido.info>

<http://nueluxe.com>

<http://www.alexisfasoli.com>

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