Empowering local governments with technology to transform Africa’s cities

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By Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments Africa

Rising urbanization across the world is a trend we cannot ignore. In Africa alone, over the next 20 years, cities must be prepared to accommodate more than 300 million new people moving from rural areas into cities. Yet many cities face challenges in modernizing their aging infrastructures to meet the needs of the growing number of citizens moving into cities in search of greater economic opportunities. In addition, many cities do not have the resources or the voice to articulate their demand to national governments on issues important to their citizens. At United Cities and Local Governments, we unite more than 1,000 cities across 95 countries to raise awareness of critical issues facing cities and local governments, regardless of the size of the communities they serve. Furthermore, UCLG Africa (UCLG A) represents 40 national associations of governments across Africa, in addition to 2,000 cities, with the goal of building unity and collaboration across local city governments.

Technology is playing a more prevalent role in how we think about solutions for challenges facing cities and their governments. Through collaborative efforts, I believe innovative technology solutions can advance cities’ infrastructures and produce opportunities to connect cities across the network and support them in urban development. Here, cross-stakeholder partnerships, including the private sector, can deliver innovation and make a real impact on the lives of Africa’s urban residents.

At the 2013 World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders and the 4th UCLG Global Congress in Rabat this week, I was pleased to announce UCLG Africa’s Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Microsoft, which leverages the knowledge and expertise of both parties to empower local government, business and citizens to shape the urban future of their cities across Africa. Together, we will focus on the establishment of the Next Cities Facility, to support our strategic priority to
provide our members with a knowledge platform. The Next Cities Facility will serve as an open, multi-partner, platform to promote innovation and relevant tools for assisting cities in modernizing their operations, enhancing their services, and increasing their engagement with a vibrant ecosystem of stakeholders.

Charbel Fakhoury (Vice President, SMSG Middle East & Africa, Microsoft), Mr. Elong Mbassi (Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments Africa), and Samir Benmakhlouf (Morocco Country Manager, Microsoft) sign a Memorandum of Understanding in Rabat, Morocco.

Through working more closely with Microsoft in the framework of the Microsoft CityNext initiative, we wish to help cities transform their infrastructures, and support city leaders in generating innovative ideas to make their cities safer, healthier, sustainable, and more successful places to live in. City-focused solutions like the Urban Dashboard developed by Microsoft with the African Development Bank have already started being rolled out in cities like Fes, Morocco.

Furthermore, one of the goals of our partnership with Microsoft is to develop solutions that can disseminate results across our advocacy and engagement programs. By analyzing the results, we can improve communication, logistics and technology access across our member local governments to ensure efficient collaboration and enrich the viability and competitiveness of African cities.

Source: Microsoft (UCLG Partner)

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