Framing document - Housing and local governance: civil society propositions to advance climate justice

Habitat International Coalition (HIC), Isandla Institute, and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) convened a two-part dialogue on housing, climate justice and care. *The goal was to discuss and give visibility to propositions from civil society and housing movements with local and regional governments throughout the research, advocacy, and political processes leading up to the UCLG World Congress in 2026 – including the U20, GOLD VII, and Local Social Covenant, among others. Participants explored how the lenses of climate justice and care provide tools to advocate for more just and adequate housing policies and practices, thereby transcending sectoral approaches to housing and establishing connections with other political agendas.*

This document is one of two framing documents that informed the dialogues: 1) housing as an infrastructure of care, and 2) climate justice. These documents will serve as the basis for the discussions at the U20 Mayoral Summit and for further informal advocacy and mobilisation moving forward.

1. The urgency and opportunity: housing and climate justice

While displacement due to weather-related hazards is mounting (41% between 2008 and 2022)[1], environmental concerns can also lead to other forms of direct and indirect displacement, through processes like as climate gentrification and green grabbing[2]. **With disproportionate effects on vulnerable communities, the crisis is no longer about sustainability but about environmental and climate justice.**

At the same time, significant political advancements in recognising the root causes of global warming and proposals for structural alternatives are promising. These include the appointment of the first UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change by the UN Human Rights Council in March 2022, the recognition by the UN General Assembly of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in May 2022 and the advisory opinions of the International Court of Justice and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights recognizing States' obligations to tackle climate change.

[1] UNHCR, "Climate change and displacement: the myths and the facts", accessed november 2023 https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/climate-change-and-displacement-myths-and-facts

[2] Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, Balakrishnan Rajagopal: Towards a just transformation: climate crisis and the right to housing", 2022 https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/612/32/PDF/G2261232.pdf?OpenElement

Such a context offers a clear opportunity for defining and amplifying the scope for advancing a human rights based integral approach to housing under the framework of addressing climate change and promoting socio-economic and territorial equality. **The above mentioned processes bring upon obligations that affect not only national governments, but also other spheres of government as well.** Local and regional governments have increasingly taken leadership in advancing climate action, pushing for urgent solutions in policy spheres that have been traditionally led by national governments, such as in the case of housing.

2. Framing

The **climate justice**[3] approach acknowledges that climate impacts are **unequally produced and distributed** across geographies and historical trajectories, class, gender, race and age[4]. Climate justice calls for **long term mitigation and adaptation strategies**, along with radical change against the production and reproduction of social and environmental injustices. At the center of the discussion is the need to address **historical and systemic inequalities.** This goes beyond recognition and requires **targeting climate action towards reducing and reversing those socio-economic and spatial inequalities.**

As such, initiatives, programmes and approaches should be based from a **reparative and redistributive approach,** prioritizing communities historically marginalized and most affected and centering the **redistribution not only of material resources, but also of power.** This entails advancing towards more horizontal and participatory forms of decision-making, as well as recognizing and **supporting community-led solutions** and response initiatives. This focus on the reduction of inequalities through redistribution and reparation opens pathways for **mainstreaming climate action, going beyond sectorial silos.** In this sense, **local and regional governments** are particularly equipped for such a transversal approach to climate justice, drawing particularly in the opportunities held to collaborate and work directly with communities. This would go beyond traditional approaches to participation and rather build upon the opportunities held by frameworks such as **public-community partnerships[5].**

At the same time that the ongoing climate crisis is acknowledged, there's a growing agreement that the world is going through a **global (albeit with regional components) housing crisis**. These are phenomena that do not exist in a vacuum and are fueled by shared root causes, namely the exploitative capitalistic logics that drive accumulation of resources and exploitation of communities and ecosystems. As it has been said, "there is no climate justice without

[3] See the Mary Robinson Foundation principles available at: https://www.mrfcj.org/principles-of-climate-justice/
[4] See HIC President's declaration on World Habitat Day, 2021, available at: https://www.hic-net.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/EN_HIC-President-Statement-WorldHabitatDay2021.pdf
[5] Global platform for the Right to the City, United Cities and Local Governments (2024) *Basic services as commons: Innovative management of basic services between local governments and communities.* Available at: https://learning.uclg.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/PLN38_Basic-Services-as-Commons.pdf

housing justice"[6]. As such, there's a growing interest and debate around the different possibilities for scope of action at the **intersection between climate and housing.**

These include, on one hand, understanding **how the climate crisis affects the fulfilment of the right to adequate housing,** be it through the logic of climate fueled displacement, or through the need for adaptation of the housing stock to increasingly recurring extreme climate events. On the other hand, it implies highlighting, mitigating and proposing alternatives to the contribution of housing stock and units as well as the dynamics, processes and value-chains associated with it to climate change. These also include debates around the **direct emissions of the construction industry, the use of alternative materials, locally sourced, the linkages between housing structures and energy chains of production and consumption, among others.** Finally, a discussion around access, management and distribution of land, as to reduce and reverse historical socio, economic and spatial inequalities is imperative. The same goes for debates on alternative economic production and consumption models, through **collective ownership and management of common resources and self-organization,** with clear implications also in terms of securing decent livelihoods

Climate policies risk maladaptation and exclusion if housing isn't central. The objective of this document is not to exhaust those linkages, but rather present some elements that are relevant both from the perspective of climate justice, as well as for the possibilities for building joint action by local and regional governments and communities. These include:

1. Addressing, remedying and preventing **climate related displacement;**
2. **Ensure access to housing and land** through reinforcing the **security of tenure and collective management of land and housing;**
3. Support to the **social production of habitat** through integral upgrading programmes;
4. Recognizing the role of **communities as first responders** and supporting **community-led data production and monitoring;**
5. Mitigation of the climate impacts of the **existing and new housing stock** (includes considerations related to materials, refurbishment, location, typology/density and others)

3. Preliminary recommendations for local and regional governments

Building upon the above described framing, this document seeks to gather a set of recommendations for local and regional governments to advance policies that respond to the climate and housing crisis under an integrated manner and from a Human Rights perspective. They include a set of broad guiding principles to center such policies as well as a set of examples of policies and measures that could be advanced in the local and regional sphere.

[6] Frediani, AA (2022) *No climate justice without housing justice*. In: 'Better cities are possible: achieving resilient, low-carbon and inclusive urban development'. IIED website.

Guiding principles to jointly address the housing & climate crises

- **Center policies on redistribution and reparation -** Prioritize historically marginalized and most affected communities and their territories, diversifying and distributing investment throughout the territory, prioritizing peripheric areas;
- **Non discrimination and intersectionality:** Ensure universal access *and* targeted support to historically marginalized communities;
- **Recognize, protect and support community organization and initiatives:** advance participatory democracy beyond consultations through direct collaboration and support to organized communities, recognizing and supporting community-led initiatives;
- **Contribute to the decommodification of common resources,** supporting collective forms of housing and land management
- **Dedicate relevant available resources to prevent, stop and remedy evictions** and other forms of expulsion and displacement

Examples of policies and measures that can be implemented in the local and regional level as to jointly respond to the climate and housing crises from a rights-based perspective:

Short-term / crisis response

- Put in place **strong evacuation plans** specifically designed for locations that not only are risk prone, but also house historically marginalized groups;
- Such evacuation plans should also center the short and mid-term housing needs of residents, safeguarding the **security of tenure of those evacuated**;
- Map and support **community groups in risk-prone areas** (including informal settlements) recognizing their role in early warning systems and as first responders;
- Recognize and support **community initiatives for prevention and response to climate related disasters**, providing support and resources so they can survive through time; (while safeguarding tenure);
- Incorporation of **community-led data** into adaptation and risk plans and fostering overall **structured participation** of communities in the elaboration of policies and plans;
- Implement programmes to encourage the **use of local materials for construction;**
- Introducing government-wide protocols to **prevent and avoid displacement** related to public works and climate vulnerability mitigation strategies;

Mid and long-term responses

- Measures, programmes and policies to protect and ensure the **security of tenure,** including campaigns for land tenure regularization;
- Put in place mechanisms for **access and collective management of public land**, through models such as community land trusts and housing cooperatives, among others;
- Implement **integral neighbourhood upgrading programmes** that are developed in partnership with communities and ensure for the improvement of housing conditions,

security of tenure, access to basic services and mitigation of environmental risks and combine environmental restoration, infrastructure upgrades, and housing;

- Push for **decentralized/nodal infrastructure** to prevent long service disruptions in case of climate related disasters;
- **Retrofitting programmes** to improve energy efficiency of the existing housing stock, coupled with mechanisms to prevent rent uptakes following such reforms