**Sanitation is Local Government’s priority**

In the debate that surrounds SDG 6 on Water and Sanitation, it is important to state clearly that effective sanitation is a prerequisite of adequate water supply. Even before addressing the diverse ways to guarantee an adequate provision of running water to an urban space, it is essential to have a clear idea of how to dispose of the used water in the first place.

The population that is not served by adequate evacuation systems, this is a matter of dignity and quality of life. It is a matter of health and decent living conditions. And it is a matter of inclusion, social and economic opportunity for all: think of all those countries in which especially women and girls do not have access to schooling (Targets 4.2 and 4.5) because of the lack of water and sanitation.

It is all the more important to guarantee an effective sanitation system in those contexts in which scarcity, quality of water supply, cost of generation and distribution still prevent a large share of the population from accessing water supply. No sustainable urbanization can be ensured without the establishment of an effective sanitation system – without additional financial burden on the users. Accordingly, all investment in planned sanitation infrastructure, in collaboration with local and regional governments, can have positive externalities for human development and the achievement of SDGs 6 and 11.

Many local and regional governments are responsible for the provision of this service. They know, better than any other tier of governance, what vulnerable groups in what areas of the territory require more integration and better access to this service, and how to fully integrate them as to achieve SDG 11.

Setting up an effective sanitation network requires funding and needs to be embedded in a long-term strategy. This turns sanitation into a significant challenge for many local and regional governments, considering the heavy investments and operating and maintenance costs related to such a basic service. These can often only be supported via institutional partnerships with several other actors at all levels: the state, the private sector, donors, and civil society, among others.

Today, 2.3 billion people do not have access to sanitation, despite the efforts made over the last fifteen years. UN Water's report shows that many countries are not keeping pace, or that their responses are already obsolete. Delay in the provision of this service is a true humanitarian emergency, especially in developing and less developed countries, in which a significant shortage in sanitation provision is combining with rapid growth in urban population.

The international community has committed, through SDG 6 (Targets 6.1 and 6.2) and the New Urban Agenda (paragraphs 72 and 73), to ensure access to sanitation for all. This is why any strategy to be put in place should build upon consensus and involvement of local and regional governments. They are the level of government closest to the citizens. They often enjoy devolved competences to provide such services. Infrastructure financing remains a crucial issue, but technical and institutional capacity-building and cooperation require attention, political effort and agreement too.

However, a community decides to manage their sanitation service, local and regional governments should co-own the process: it is their responsibility to guarantee its sustainability, and the dignity, inclusion and equal rights of the citizens that depend on it.