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Cultural Organization

Organisation
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pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Dr Indrajit Banerjee,
Director, Knowledge Societies Division
UNESCO**

Thank you Chairperson,

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Cities are the places, where the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost.

More than half of the world's population today lives in the cities – in one generation, this will rise to two thirds.

Cities are our greatest motors of dynamism, growth, innovation and 'living together.'

The concept paper and discussions show well the manifold opportunities, which lie in smart physical and digital infrastructure, potentially transforming cities.

But we have to say today too that cities are also sources of injustice, poverty and exclusion, and that technology might actually accentuate some of the existing disparities. Cities have to therefore also from the outset address disparities and become key actors for peace and development in the century ahead -- our challenge is to ensure that this peace is *lasting*, that this development is *sustainable*.

Infrastructure planning, technologies, water and energy supply – these are essential 'hardware' for sustainable cities.

They need the right 'software' to work. This goes to the heart of UNESCO's work in communication and information, sciences, culture and on lifelong learning, in order to provide women and men with tools to make the most of change, to create more inclusive, prosperous and sustainable societies and cities.

UNESCO uses the term of learning cities, and it would be good to take into account some of the key features of learning cities, their foundations and building blocks, as a checklist for our thoughts and future action – and these need of course to be adapted to individual contexts. For those interested in more details, I refer to the leading work of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, which has created a dynamic network – at the global, national and municipal levels, bringing together also experts and the private sector.¹

It is at municipal level that the greatest capacity exists for innovation and implementation of policies, which respond to social, economic and political changes. This is why the potential of cities and urban regions to play a greater role in promoting social inclusion, economic growth and environmental protection is especially high. In UNESCO, many cities have benefited from participating in international policy dialogue, action research, capacity building and peer learning, and use learning city approaches to offer lifelong learning opportunities to their citizens. Others have applied learning city approaches to tackle specific challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In summary, I wanted to draw your attention to UNESCO's ongoing learning city work and to acknowledge that the hardware will only be useful and work, if we have acted on the soft components early and with the same rigour. Policies, capabilities of people, content and lifelong learning are at the heart of all our work to build inclusive knowledge societies, at the heart also of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This is the way to boost the potential of every society.

This is the way to bring sustainability to all development efforts, and cities have a unique role to play here.

This is my call for action today, to work with Governments, civil society and the private sector in building – *city by city* – a future of dignity for all.

I am not saying this will be easy – but I believe we share a vision, we have experience to build on, and we can move forward together.

Thank you.

¹ <http://learningcities.uil.unesco.org/home>

