Key Messages of UCLG concerning Basic Services
UN Habitat Governing Council 2011
Dialogue on Public Services and Infrastructure
Inputs for Mr. Muchadeyi Ashton Masunda, Co-President of
UCLG and Mayor of Harare, Zimbabwe

Provision of Public Services key role of local authorities

Local Authorities which constitute UCLG recognize that public services and public goods play an essential role in promoting the wellbeing of all its citizens, reducing inequality and fostering social cohesion.

High quality, accessible, affordable public services strengthen the city’s economic as well as social life and help to create a common sense of belonging. They help to make the city attractive for investment and settlement.

The city’s staff and administration – at all levels – should have not only a strong public service ethos but also a commitment to quality, effective management, transparency and accountability.

Good Local Governance key to basic service provision

We are well aware that the success of local democracy and decentralisation will be judged by the capacity to provide access to these services and at a price affordable to the targeted beneficiaries, i.e. the poor and disadvantaged members of our communities.

Even when local authorities do not have recognised powers in service provision, on account of their proximity, the population often holds them responsible for their existence and the quality of their livelihoods.

This seems to be particularly true in the case of basic services, whose absence hinders all local economic development.

To permit all actors, including local governments, civic society organizations and service providers to fully play their roles and assume their responsibilities in relation to access to basic services at all levels, central authorities should develop an enabling legislation which clarifies the competences and finances for different levels of government.

Strengthening the capacity of local authorities in terms of their political responsibility will be key to sound participatory and demand driven service provision.
**Basic Services cornerstone of the MDGs**

Increasingly, local authorities are being targeted as the best placed to define policies relating to the provision of basic services. It is estimated that around 85% of the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved at local level and through the provision of basic services.

Basic Public Services include infrastructure-related services such as supply of potable water and sanitation facilities, waste management, energy and transport, education, health and public safety.

Accordingly, the **principle of subsidiarity**, upon which “public responsibilities should be exercised by those elected authorities which are closest to the citizens” is crucial for the implementation of basic services on a reliable, cost-effective and sustainable basis.

There are also varying degrees of freedom within which local authorities may discharge these onerous responsibilities. There are also some areas where local powers are commonly found in some regions and absent in others. For example, in terms of education and health services local authorities may manage staff and pay their salaries in some regions but only have the responsibility for current operating costs and infrastructure maintenance in others.

Furthermore, without the appropriate financing and setting of tariffs, it is not possible to operate, maintain and develop service infrastructure.

**Funding**

The promotion of full cost recovery should take into account all dimensions, **including a risk analysis of financial reliability** of all providers.

Local Authorities will need to have the ability and capacity to identify and exploit revenue generating mechanisms related to the provision of public services and to enact appropriate legislation framework in this field.

**UCLG calls on national governments and international associations to increase the capacities of local and regional authorities to deliver services.**

**UCLG is devoting its flag-ship publication, the Global Report on Decentralization and Local Democracy (GOLD) to studying the delivery of Basic Services.**