



# LOCAL ACTION

## KIGALI 2023 COMMONWEALTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE REPORT



**Dr. Edouard Ngirente, Prime Minister of the Republic of Rwanda making his opening remarks at the conference in Kigali, 14/11/23**

The Commonwealth Local Government Conference 2023 was held in Kigali Rwanda from 14th to 17<sup>th</sup> November 2023 under the theme, Building Local Government Resilience across the Commonwealth. The conference brought together local government ministers, mayors, and other leaders and stakeholders from 40 Commonwealth countries.

One of the major highlights of the conference was the partnership between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) to run an "SDG Corner". This exhibition space allowed mayors, local government leaders, and stakeholders to share their stories of resilience and innovation in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDG Corner was particularly popular due to its interactive display of inflatable balls representing different SDGs, creating a relaxed environment for leaders to network and share their work.

The conference was officially opened by Hon. Dr. Edouard Ngirente, the prime minister of the Republic of Rwanda, who emphasized the importance of strengthening the resilience of local governments and finding innovative solutions to their challenges.



**Representatives from the City of Kigali and Homa Bay County in Kenya, at the SDG Corner**

Two days were dedicated to working group sessions on issues such as climate change, disaster risk resilience, local economic development, health, migration and rapid urbanization. Others included public finance management and partnering with the private sector.

Raul Espinosa, UNDP's Operations and Quality Assurance Specialist under the Global Mayors' Campaign joined the working group session that discussed *'Partnering with the Private Sector'* on 15<sup>th</sup> /11/23, where he emphasized UNDP's continued support to local governments.



**Raul Espinosa, UNDP (centre, with no jacket) during the working group session**

On November 16th, 2023, the UNDP, CLGF, and the City of Kigali organized a side event titled "How Agenda 2030 is Helping Cities to Innovate and Scale Up Local Projects." The event was moderated by Jenifer Bukokhe, the Deputy Director of Local Transformative Finance at UNCDF. Presentations were delivered by

the City of Kigali, Rourkela Municipality in India, Homa Bay County in Kenya, and the Island nation of St. Lucia.

Both Kigali and Rourkela were among the winners of the Global Mayors Challenge, a competition launched in 2021 with the support of Bloomberg Philanthropies. The competition aimed to recognize the most ambitious and groundbreaking urban innovations that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic

David Musonera, the Project Supervisor of the Kigali City Global Mayor's Challenge, elaborated on the city's efforts to manage waste and enhance water use efficiency during the initial phase. As part of these efforts, the city has constructed rainwater harvest reservoirs and implemented smart waste collection stations. These initiatives aim to enhance the lives and living standards of individuals residing in informal settlements, which constitute 63% of the city's population. By improving sanitation and water quality, Kigali aims to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6.4, which focuses on addressing water scarcity.

Rourkela Municipality's Bewin Tom, UNDP Project Supervisor, Global Mayor's Challenge, and Deputy Commissioner Gourabamaya Pradhan of Rourkela Municipal Corporation spoke highly of their solar-powered cold rooms project. This initiative has provided a means for women farmers and vendors to store their vegetables for longer periods, ultimately enhancing their household income by reducing wastage and increasing shelf life. The cold rooms are managed by women self-help groups, consisting of 10-15 women who receive interest-free loans from the government. This project has been a game changer for Rourkela, contributing towards various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The market women's income has seen a remarkable 60% increase, promoting gender equality. Additionally, it has helped reduce inequality by bridging the gap between the poor and the rich. The cold rooms operate on solar power, effectively promoting clean energy usage and leading to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The implementation of this project is a partnership effort between Rourkela Municipality, UNDP, various state departments, and has received funding support from Bloomberg Philanthropies, highlighting the collaboration for achieving the SDGs.

On the other hand, Homa Bay County in Kenya ensures inclusivity of all citizens in decision-making and promotes social accountability in public administration. Grace Mercy Osewe, the Executive Committee Member, Governance, Administration, Communication and Devolution presented the county's ambitious efforts to realize Agenda 2030. Homa Bay County established a cabinet committee of SDGs and an SDG coordination unit housed in the Department of Finance and Economic Planning with SDG champions from each department who ensure that SDGS are mainstreamed and that targets are monitored. The country also developed a five-year integrated action plan 2023-2027, a community-led road map for mainstreaming the SDGs and achieving specific targets. In addition, Homa Bay has implemented a climate resilience innovation hub, which serves as a research and demonstration centre for climate adaptation solutions. This includes practices like climate-smart agriculture, renewable and clean energy usage, water harvesting, sustainable waste management, and climate-resilient options. The hub also functions as an information centre and early warning system for climate resilience and disaster risk management.

Despite the county's resource constraints, they are actively seeking partnerships and implementing a resource mobilization strategy to overcome these challenges and accomplish their goals.





Rourkela Municipality's Bewin Tom presenting at the UNDP Side Event as other panelists follow.

Hon. Richard Frederick, the Minister for Housing and Local Government, from St. Lucia elaborated on the challenges caused by climate change in his city of Castries and the inaccessibility of funding to address them. Castries is located in a low-lying area, surrounded by mountains and without a proper drainage system and when it rains, it becomes a repository for rainwater.

The Minister noted that although the Caribbean Island nations emit almost no carbon into the atmosphere, they bear the brunt of the climate crisis arising from emissions by other countries, especially developed nations. Only 10% of the island is flat land which competes for agriculture, residence, tourism, and industrial development, putting immense pressure on this land and making it vulnerable to flooding. The slightest sea level rises easily result in flooding of the city.

To address the above challenge, the government of St. Lucia requested the UN to facilitate the construction of a proper drainage system that prevents the water from the mountains from converging into the city, but this is still pending a response. In the interim, they installed two heavy-duty to redirect flood water into the sea to minimize the flooding and related damage. Educating the citizens about the dangers of improper garbage disposal is also a key priority.

**Quote:** *“When I arrived in Kigali, I saw the cleanliness of the city, I asked questions and I must say that Kigali is my envy in terms of their policy direction. If all cities globally take a leaf from Kigali, our environment will be in a much better state”*- **Hon. Richard Frederick, St. Lucia**

Additionally, the minister called for a uniform voice to compel agencies that act as custodians for the funding to timely release funds needed for restoring areas damaged due to climate change.

During the question-and-answer session, audience members raised inquiries about sanitation in the informal settlements of Kigali, health access in Homa Bay, sustainability of Rourkela's Cold Rooms project, and the conference's approach to road safety SDG. In response, the City of Kigali shared their strategies, including the relocation of citizens from low-lying areas to the hills, stormwater studies, and rainwater harvesting. They also emphasized the importance of citizens' contributions to maintaining the cleanliness of the city. Homa Bay County acknowledged that they are still working towards universal health access but have implemented targeted programs. They also expressed interest in adopting Kigali's enforcement of

traffic laws to address road safety challenges. The Rourkela team highlighted the technological approaches to sustain their Cold Rooms project, including scheduled maintenance and setting aside financial resources for future maintenance.

**Quote** *“Much as we have challenges that come with urbanization in our cities, we can change them into opportunities and the examples shared have been inspirational”.* **Jenifer Bukokhe, UNCDF/ Side Event Moderator.**

Overall, the Commonwealth Local Government Conference 2023 provided a valuable platform for local governments worldwide to share ideas, learn from one another, and showcase innovative solutions to accelerate and achieve the SDGs.

### **Annexures**

1. Conference Agenda <https://www.clgc2023.rw/programme/agenda>
2. Kigali Declaration [https://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/KOS\(1\).pdf](https://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/KOS(1).pdf)