



OPENING CEREMONY

SUMMARY OF THE REMARKS AT THE IOPD 20TH CONFERENCE

The conference room of the Hotel Ivoire located in the municipality of Cocody, hosted on October 20th, 2021, the opening ceremony of IOPD 20th conference attended by international and national media.

It started with the libation ceremonies of the Cocody-Village chieftdom and the opening remarks of Mrs. Nelly OUASSENAN, 3rd Deputy Mayor of the hosting municipality. Afterwards, the Director General of WHO, Tredros GHEBREYESUS made a speech by video conference. He praised the initiatives taken by the IOPD and expressed his support for the issues raised by this conference. His speech paved the way for the other speakers to share their vision on IOPD issues.

The third speaker, Mr. Gervais Coulibaly, Prefect hors grade, in his opening remarks, stressed the importance of participatory democracy through the statement "How can participatory democracy guarantee or even ensure sustainable development".

After the courtesies and gratitude towards the government authorities, the diplomatic corps, the local elected officials and the traditional authorities,

Gervais Coulibaly mentioned that participatory democracy is the guarantee for a sustainable development of cities. In other words, we need to address this question: How can participatory democracy guarantee or even ensure sustainable development? To answer this question, it is important to redefine the notion of sustainable development, because for some thinkers, this definition is biased.

The prefect quoted Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtlan, Norwegian Prime Minister, who said that "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In other words, sustainable development implies that human societies shall live and meet their needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The implementation of this concept entails taking into account different elements, namely :

- Preservation of the environment and natural resources
- Social equity,
- The economy.

Mr. Gervais Coulibaly then compared the issue of sustainable development to that of the sustainable city.

The issue of the city can cover two (2) meanings:

1. The city can refer to a type of local government.
2. An urban unit, an agglomeration for the purposes of our exercise.

The second definition will be adopted. The sustainable city is therefore an urban unit that meets the principles of sustainable development and green

urbanism. But before describing the principles of sustainable development that an urban area must meet to be recognized as a sustainable city, we should first highlight the challenges faced by cities and the daily concerns of local elected officials. The challenges generally encountered are:

- Waste management
- Pollution
- Transportation (traffic jams with long waiting hours)
- Housing
- Insecurity
- Urban population growth
- Social inequalities.

Addressing these challenges leads to the recognition of a city as a sustainable city. One of the main objectives of this conference is to provide to local governments in general, and to those of the IOPD specifically, solutions that can make the cities they are in charge to become sustainable cities.

The organizing committee has selected four (4) main issues that ultimately cover the challenges faced by the urban units (those mentioned above).

The analysis of these issues will be organized in the following way:

- 1- A conference on each thematic axis
- 2- Panels will be organized in order to discuss and exchange experiences and to take resolutions if needed.

Here are the areas of consideration :

Area 1 : Local economic development

In this area, consideration will be paid to the fight against poverty. The creation of decent jobs and wealth, the Covid situation which has significantly induced economic growth, will be taken into account, particularly in the development of commercial activities in metropolitan suburbs.

Area 2 : Environment and citizen participation

This area will be an opportunity for participants to consider and propose solutions to local governments officials to improve living conditions in the community, based on the citizen's participation. The improvement of the living conditions will concern both the management of environmental issues and the management of sanitation issues and city beautification as well.

Area 3 : Right to the city

It will address the issue of cities where it is pleasant to live together and in harmony. This area will enable the participants to discuss the issue of urban housing, health and the regulation on the inclusive city.

Area 4 : Gouvernance and participatory democracy

The subtopics of this area will be participatory budgeting, women's leadership, and residents' participation in neighborhood management. Participants will be able to consider solutions that can help qualify an agglomeration as a sustainable city.

Mais en quoi reconnait-on une ville durable ?

But how can one recognize a sustainable city?

There are different opinions on this issue. The speaker proposes six (6) following elements:

1. Environment

Take steps to limit urban pollution and the artificialization of agricultural land while ensuring that resources are conserved.

2. Sustainable city

It is a city where mobility can be developed while limiting urban sprawl.

3. Economic plan

Establishing measures that promote the creation of wealth and employment.

Ensure that the city is integrated into national and international networks.

4. Fair cities

Ensure the rehabilitation of disadvantaged neighborhoods. Limit the increase in real estate costs as much as possible. Develop the city in such a way that proximity services are distributed in the most efficient way.

5. Taking the social dimension into account

To fight against exclusion and to ensure that the most modest live alongside the most affluent. Promote social diversity throughout the city. Eliminate precarious housing by offering an acceptable solution to those who used to live there without constraints.

6. A livable city

Local governments officials must ensure the well-being of the population.

After having outlined the different principles, the speaker proposed to see how participatory democracy can be a guarantee of participatory cities.

It is a form of sharing based on strengthening the participation of citizens in decisionmaking.

Participatory democracy tends to complement and perfect democracy. It represents direct democracy a step further.

Applied to the management of local communities, participatory democracy means consulting citizens in local decision-making. The latter (citizens) will therefore be associated with the design of the project, and then with its implementation if possible or necessary. Thus, the speaker advised local governments officials to set up structures or organisations such as extra-communal councils, neighbourhood advisory councils or even to manage already existing organisations such as neighbourhood unions.

It strongly recommends that local governments officials take the opinion of their constituents or involve them in the preparation of their various development plans and programmes such as the Strategic Local Development Plans (SLDP) and the threeyear programme. The advantage of this approach is that it allows the citizens to take ownership of the project. As an example, he mentions the construction of a maternity hospital where those who will use it should be consulted as well as the choice of the site where the maternity hospital will be built. Participatory democracy thus induces the participation of citizens who discuss and decide together, generally under the arbitration of elected officials, their representatives they selected themselves. Doing so, even if they are in the minority on certain topics, they (the citizens) appropriate the project which they understand better the motivations, adopt it and defend it if necessary (whether it is related to health or other aspects).

To conclude, the speaker noted that for an urban unit to meet the appropriate conditions of a sustainable city, two (2) essentials conditions are needed:

- 1- The political will of both central and local governments by involving the citizens through participatory democracy.

2- The citizens or constituents who agree to be involved take ownership of it and implement it.

If these two (2) conditions are met, then participatory democracy will be the guarantee of a sustainable city.

Regarding the 4th speaker, Mr. DANHO Paulin, considered that this forum aims at reinforcing the role of cities and territories through a participative democracy in a competitive world. It is an opportunity to exchange, to reposition communities at the heart of the development strategy of States. We have to recognise that today, more than ever, we have to change our paradigm, as our environment has been endowed with new concepts. It is more and more important to have participatory budgets, to think about the right to the city, citizen participation, ecological transition, resilient cities and green cities, smart cities, etc.

Participatory democracy is based on the commitment and involvement of our fellow citizens in collective decision-making. We must note that the management of our cities must be the business of all, from this point of view, what must be done so that this principle becomes more and more a reflex in the social body? It is in this respect that the speaker welcomes the relevance of the issues to be addressed so that at the end of this activity, new perspectives are defined while meeting the challenges of local governance. Today, in the digital age, what are the strategies for more participation of our fellow citizens in the political, economic and social choices they are concerned with? How can we get our populations to not only elect candidates but to do more?

Today, the populations must be at the side of the elected officials and take an active part, give their opinions on the life of their communities, on the choice of priorities and see if they are in adequacy with the electoral promises. According to Mr. DANHO Paulin, this is the challenge of this conference. Deeply dealing with the problems raised by our fellow citizens and providing relevant answers, listening, inventing new innovative procedures to involve our people in the design and evaluation of policies.

For him, any great change brings melancholy and often resistance. But we must make sure that we have less inertia and more commitment to follow democratic actions with interest. Let us think globally but act locally. Let's make democracy the basis of our reflections and let's bring our populations in this democratic renewal, to appropriate all the policies, to get seriously involved to change qualitatively our daily lives.

It is together with a constant commitment that we will change our cities into sustainable territories and into relevant territories to welcome future generations.

For the 5th speaker, after the usual courtesies, Eric PIOLLE, Mayor of Grenoble, expressed his happiness before revealing that his municipality and those of the rest of the world have in common the defence of human rights. He mentioned the importance of holding the 20th IOPD conference in Côte d'Ivoire in Africa, where participatory democracy has its full meaning. In spite of this similarity between the cities, Participatory Development still makes sense in the current health crisis. It is therefore imperative to involve citizens in decision-making and public policies. This action is essential to the workings of inclusive cities and helps to solve everyday problems. Through this

participation, the population is able to reappropriate the vision of elected officials.

It is a new concept that can lead to successful results.

He gave the example of Grenoble where participatory actions have brought citizens closer to those in power. This action has led to the implementation of a participatory budget since the summer of 2014, which has led to the opening of many sustainable and ecological projects. This action has earned the city of Grenoble the title of European Green Capital.

He announced that the 21st annual international conference on participatory democracy will be held from 7 to 10 December 2022 in Grenoble on the theme "Time for action".

As for the 6th speaker, at the beginning of his speech, the Mayor of Cocody Mr. Jean Marc YACE wished the traditional akwaba to the personalities and delegations for their massive presence in the Ivorian land. This presence reflects the universal brotherhood in which we are all united and a reason for great satisfaction. This brotherhood rich of our racial, ideological, political and social differences draws in our common citizenship pertaining to the world. As a citizen of the world, we must seize these types of forum opportunities to make a serene and uncompromising diagnosis of the state of the planet, our common habitat.

The COVID 19 health crisis that has impacted my mandate and my commune (Cocody), global warming, hunger, terrorism, environmental degradation, poverty and gender prejudice are alarming signals that require us to become collectively aware and take much more action and solidarity so that the planet can be preserved.

For my part, I remain convinced that solutions are existing to change the face of the earth and open up the prospect of a happier and more united life in the world. These solutions allow us to meet the objectives of sustainable development as established by the member states of the United Nations.

It is therefore fitting that during three days, the 20th IOPD conference will focus on a series of conferences and panels related to the sustainability of cities and territories with all national and international experts.

The strategic reflection will be carried out around four important areas likely to make our cities more modern, more economic, more resilient. These are local economic development, environment and citizen participation, the right to the city and governance and participatory democracy.

I would like at this step to express my sincere thanks to the Head of State, His Excellency President Alassane OUATTARA, to the Prime Minister and to the members of the government. My gratitude to the Supervising Minister Mr. Vagondo Coulibaly for his advice without forgetting the institutions UNDP, the District of Abidjan and others for their support and strong involvement in the success of this event.

After two years at the head of the IOPD, I will hand over to the city of Grenoble headed by Mayor Eric PIOLLE. I will be by your side for 2022 and wish you all the best for the next conference.

Minister VAGONDO DIOMANDE then spoke on behalf of the Government. On behalf of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, I would like to welcome all the delegations from all over the world taking part in this 20th ODP conference.

You are welcome in Côte d'Ivoire, a country distinguished by the legendary hospitality of its inhabitants and their unique sense of African brotherhood by making Abidjan the venue for these meetings. You honour the choice of Côte d'Ivoire and you honour its people. It is a satisfaction Mr. Mayor of the city of Cocody, President of the ODP for having succeeded in the challenge of this organization.

Mr. Mayor, as you prepare to hand over to another who is right next to you and who is certainly waiting impatiently, I would like to take advantage of this solemn ceremony to congratulate you for having enhanced the image of our country through your exceptional presidency at the head of this international organization. It is certain that the holding of these meetings in Abidjan, only the second African city to host this conference after Matola in Mozambique in 2016, is one of the most tangible results of this impeccable governance despite the pandemic, as you just mentioned yourself.

I would also like to greet and thank, through you, all your colleagues, mayors as well as all the presidents of regional councils who have accepted to take part in this conference for having understood that this conference is indeed relevant.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as we all know, the ODP conference offers a space for reflection and for experience sharing as well as innovation. It represents a real opportunity to open up to the world, an opportunity of meeting and networking. Indeed, the rapid urbanization of our states requires that all energies be federated around sustainable development plans and programs to ensure their success.

The theme of this conference is sustainable cities/territories and participatory democracy, the participatory approach to sustainable

development of cities is part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and aims to ensure that cities remain resilient and sustainable spaces in an environment of cohesion, peace and justice.

Participatory democracy therefore calls for initiatives to be based on our fellow citizens. It is a requirement of modernity because today more than ever our citizens in general and young people in particular aspire more and more to be involved in the decision-making process relating to the improvement of their living environment. But that requires, you agree with me, strategies of sensitization and training for our populations in the field of the management of the city in order to be helped by observers and the well informed actors. I would also like to express my fervent wish that this conference gives the necessary tools to enable local elected officials to give precise responses to this requirement.

Considering the quality of the speakers and the relevance of the subtopics, I have no doubt that your work will be sanctioned by resolutions that can give new weapons to our fellow citizens to fully play their role in building a truly democratic society, a condition for a balanced and sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is with these words of hope that I declare open the 20th Conference of the International Observatory of Participatory Democracy. I thank you for your kind attention.

