

CSO PARTICIPATION AT THE UN

Perspectives on CSO Engagement in UN Processes

In This Issue

S-G urges for a practical approach in utilizing CSOs for networked multilateralism

Member States emphasize sovereignty of states when deciding the limits of CSO participation

Few states favour dedicated focal point for CSOs

Luxembourg calls the NGO committee “not fit for purpose”.

Article 71 of UN Charter

“The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence. Such arrangements may be made with international organizations and, where appropriate, with national organizations after consultation with the Member of the United Nations concerned.”

<https://legal.un.org/repertory/art71.shtml>

Resources/Links

S-G’s report on **Our Common Agenda**:
<https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/>

PGA’s letter on **Our Common Agenda**:
<https://www.un.org/pga/76/2021/12/23/letter-from-the-president-of-the-general-assembly-oca/>

Video link for 5th thematic cluster of **Our Common Agenda** “Enhancing international cooperation”:
<https://media.un.org/en/asset/k11/k114oeamc7>

Virtual Town Hall Meeting of Civil Society and UN S-G António Guterres (CSW66 Side Event):
<https://media.un.org/en/asset/k13/k13s90qe2i>

High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)- Vision of Civil Society:
<https://media.un.org/en/asset/k16/k16ho7znrn>

Philippines cautions against favouring particular ideologies

- Values "engagement with NGOs, civil society organizations, academia, private sector and other stakeholders. Engagement with civil society must be open, inclusive and balanced."
- Cautions "against engaging only or favouring organizations or groups that espouse a particular ideology, belief or advocacy, and excluding those with contrary views".
- Seeks clarification on "how accountability can be ensured from civil society organizations", and the plan to make the UN a 'convener' "where 'all sectors can make commitments and be accountable'."

S-G reiterates importance of CSOs at CSW66

- Emphasizes his allyship and keen interest in CSOs and their views, at the Commission on the Status of Women.
- Is "deeply concerned about the decline in civil space globally. According to a survey just 3% of people around the world live in countries where CSOs can operate with full freedom."

- “CSOs are a vital voice for human rights. When civil society is muzzled, we lose an essential forum for dialogue - the lifeblood of democracy. That's why I advocate for every possible opportunity for the protection and expansion of civic space.”
- Acknowledges that developed nations have strong CSOs and the developing world needs more support to have a stronger role - because they are the countries suffering the consequences of inequalities.
- Believes that creating a focal point in all departments (who will also be committed to support civil society in the developing world) will give CSOs more direct forms of intervention in the processes that take place in the UN System.
- “To put pressure on states we need to build coalitions of the willing.” Urges CSOs to build coalitions and alliances to fight issues such as patriarchy which afflicts developing countries more.

“The Committee (for Development Policy) further reiterates its recommendation that the Council and Member States undertaking voluntary national reviews explore ways to tap into new opportunities to make the review processes more inclusive, while ensuring adequate representation of groups that are disadvantaged. That requires the ongoing engagement of civil society and space in the review process for independent input from all stakeholders, including the presentation of shadow reports.”

- Committee for Development Policy Document E/2022/33

Plenary Segment- MS Statements

10 March, 2022

[Yemen/Arab Group](#)

[European Union](#)

[Dominican Republic/Alliance for Development in Democracy, Costa Rica, Panama, Dominican Republic](#)

[Denmark/Nordic Countries](#)

[Luxembourg/Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg](#)

[Malawi/Least Developed Countries \(LDC\)](#)

[Lesotho/African Group](#)

[New Zealand/Canada, Australia and New Zealand \(CANZ\)](#)

[Mongolia/Landlocked Developing Countries \(LLDC\)](#)

[Barbados/Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#)

[Japan](#)

[Colombia](#)

[Egypt](#)

[Cambodia](#)

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[China](#)

[Russian Federation](#)

[Bulgaria](#)

[Singapore](#)

Dominican Republic welcomes “move towards a UN system that provides more cohesive support to Governments”

- “Must promote a sustainable and productive economic recovery based on synergies.”
- Calls for active support of country teams to "provide active assistance that calls for the renewal of social contracts with the population, including women and youth, dedicating special attention on building trust, fighting discrimination and exclusion once and for all”.
- Recognizes "the need to strengthen the links between knowledge centers throughout the United Nations system to produce information with a more strategic and action-oriented approach”.

- Inclusion of diverse voices including “CSOs, faith-based organizations, universities, financial institutions, and local movements including those led by women and youth” deemed essential to achieving SDGs.

Overhauling the NGO Committee? Luxembourg Calls the Committee “Not Fit For Purpose”; EU calls for Committee Reformation

- Finds it regrettable “that a large and growing number of NGO applications for consultative status continue to be arbitrarily deferred...”
- Human rights organizations in particular, are disproportionately blocked”.
- What is needed: “enhance transparency, consistency and impartiality in the work of the NGO committee. As well as a fairer and more expeditious accreditation process of non-governmental organizations.”
- The EU in its statement calls on ECOSOC to “reform the NGO committee, guaranteeing transparency and not allowing accreditations to be taken hostage by political interests at a time of shrinking space for civil society, effective instruments and sufficient resources are pivotal factors”.

S-G discourages turning question of CSOs into “theological” discussion

- Reiterates that the UN is an intergovernmental organization and decisions are led by Member States.
- Recognizes that other actors play a key role in formulating and implementing decisions made at the UN.
- Climate change, COVID-19, and humanitarian action are prime examples of this engagement.
- How can decisions be implemented if the actors responsible don’t have a voice? For example, cities contribute 70% of emissions; need to get city administrations involved.
- Civil society plays a very important role in mobilizing the public opinion in order to be able to facilitate the action of governments in this regard.

- S-G: It's not a question of having civil society part of the decision-making bodies. It is to have the possibility of civil society, the business community, cities and the academia to be listened to when we take our decisions and to enforce the conditions from our sites to be able to implement in that area of responsibility the decision taken by governments and by intergovernmental processes.
- Need for a focal point for CSOs so that they can engage with the organizations of civil society in the developing countries for them to have a much bigger role in the proposals, in the ideas, even the suggestions have come to our own intergovernmental processes.

“The MC12 (12th Ministerial Conference) represents the most dangerous play yet for expanded corporate influence over global economic rulemaking since the WTO’s founding nearly three decades ago. If rich country trade ministries, heavily influenced by big business lobbies, are successful in their efforts to launch ‘WTO reform,’ it could legitimize new pathways for plurilateral agreements. These are already being undertaken through so-called Joint Statement Initiatives, or JSIs, which are incompatible with the multilateral rules of the WTO.”

- Deborah James: *Why It Matters What’s Going on Right Now at the WTO*

Sweden emphasizes tackling unequal power structures to ensure effective CSO participation

- Believes it is the responsibility of Member States to make civil society participation part and parcel of their work at multilateral forums. Points to Generation Equality Forum as a successful example of a multi-stakeholder platform driven by civil society and youth.
- Must make it safe for CSOs to participate. The S-G’s Call for Action for Human Rights, and its mutually reinforcing relation to OCA is a strong solution to this.

- Requires considerable expertise and adequate long term and predictable resources.

Lesotho/African group wants to “avoid mixing mandates” by changing CSOs role

- Sees CSOs as valuable in "expanding the scope of the global vision and presenting proposals and creative ideas that would enhance the effectiveness of joint international action".
- But wants to continue working within the existing frameworks through the NGO committee and ECOSOC.

“The @UN is the only place where countries can negotiate #GlobalTaxRules on an equal footing. No progress will be made if the structures at the global level don't change”

- @DerejeAlemay (via Twitter)

Governments agree on “networked multilateralism” as long as sovereignty of state is maintained

- Many states want to avoid confusing mandates and to adhere to the provisions of the UN charter/multi-stakeholder partnership without new structures or layers.
- Singapore looks at the network multilateral system as an architecture of international institutions. All work closely together and complement each other with the UN system playing a leading role in bringing the voices and actors together for the broader goal of enhancing international cooperation.
- Japan recommends streamlining existing frameworks to deliver coherent messages and enhance cooperation in fragmented exchanges. Institutional reforms “should strengthen bottom-up processes to capture the voices of people most in need and deliver solutions to countries, communities and people.”
- China believes in following existing rules and procedures with regards to CSO participation; seeks further clarity on a dedicated focal point for CSOs.

- Russia rejects creating focal points for CSOs, disagrees with reforming the NGO committee.
- In response to UN Women’s MoU with BlackRock, several feminists groups and individuals write “...the trend of a corporate capture of the UN is largely seen in the Secretary-General’s Our Common Agenda, which places priority on a ‘networked multilateralism’ with several multi-stakeholder proposals.... while the UN welcomes private donors, their influence is carried to shape programme priorities. Multistakeholderism and networked multilateralism assert duty bearers, rights holders, and corporate interests are all equal stakeholders and in doing so, obscures the power imbalances that exist among these groups. Corporations, unlike governments, are accountable to their shareholders with a view to increase profit. This, in many cases, is directly in conflict with the transformation needed to protect people and the planet... The UN should not need to be reminded of its mandate by observers. Its governance systems should incorporate civil society leaders to help prevent these mistakes. For this reason, we recommend that feminist organizations should have formal seats in UN’s advisory groups and leadership (including to its Executive Board).”

Appropriate representation of the youth and regional organizations welcomed by Malawi/LDCs

- “The youth population of 226 million in LDCs is a critical asset for their development and a real agent of change.”
- Brings to attention “unpaid internships and JPO programme, which serve as well-established entry channels to UN careers, but often remain unattainable for youth from the least developed countries”.
- Calls for a closer involvement of the UN “regional commissions and agencies, in close coordination and cooperation with subregional and regional development banks, in the implementation of the new Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries”.

“Rescind the BlackRock partnership, set standards for future private sector partnerships, involve #feminist civil society in UN Women governance.”

- @UN_CSW (via Twitter)

Civil society writes to UN Women on MoU with BlackRock

- “The partnership between BlackRock and UN Women presents serious and potentially irreparable risks to UN Women’s reputation. It gives UN Women the job of sanitizing the reputation of an asset management institution whose investments have contributed to some degree to climate catastrophe, the economic immiseration of women and other groups marginalized because of sexuality, gender, race, and class, and the proliferation of weapons and by association, the increased recourse to political violence in unstable politics....

To see the world’s leading institution for the defense of women’s rights in league with an enabler of patriarchal dominance, violence, and ecological collapse, with not a word directed to critiquing or reforming BlackRock, could spell the end of UN Women’s credibility as a gender equality institution.”

- “The trend of a corporate capture of the UN is largely seen in the Secretary-General’s Our Common Agenda, which places priority on a ‘networked multilateralism’ with several multi-stakeholder proposals...

Multistakeholderism and networked multilateralism assert duty bearers, rights holders, and corporate interests are all equal stakeholders and in doing so, obscures the power imbalances that exist among these groups. Corporations, unlike governments, are accountable to their shareholders with a view to increase profit...

This, in many cases, is directly in conflict with the transformation needed to protect people and the planet. One example of this in Our Common Agenda is the proposal for a multistakeholder digital technology track in preparation for the 2023 Summit for the Future to agree on a Global Digital Compact

to be informed by the existing High-Level Panel of Experts on Digital Cooperation, co-chaired by Melinda Gates and Jack Ma – two members of the corporate sector that have conflicting interests with the public good. How can global corporations be trusted to recommend the strict regulation needed of digital technologies?”

“The civil society, on behalf of all non-state development actors, reminds the government of Sri Lanka of their inalienable duty to protect and facilitate civil society spaces, which allows all stakeholders to take ownership over the country’s transformation to a sustainable development and to achieve the system change demanded by the people of Sri Lanka. Leaving no one behind and meaningful participation must be more than a tick box reporting slogan, and a core value of Sri Lanka’s governing systems.”

- Sri Lankan representative from the Asia-Pacific Regional CSO engagement mechanism, commenting on Sri Lanka’s VNRs.

HLPF Feature: Role of CSOs

What: The High-Level Political Forum, 2022 - *Vision of civil society: Leaving no one behind in recovering better*, saw active participation from and discussion about CSOs and their role in inter-governmental processes.

Event Description: How can we identify those left behind and how can we provide social protection and other measures to contribute to more equal societies and build resilience?

<https://hlpf.un.org/2022/programme/vision-of-civil-society-leaving-no-one-behind-in-recovering-better>

"I invite member states to fulfill their commitments to the UN. We see massive corporate capture of the UN. We are totally against OCA which tokenizes our issues to get corporate power into the decision making tables. And in this regard, I want to call out UN Women for partnering with Black Rock which is a criminal space that is preying on debt in countries like Sri Lanka, voting openly against labour rights and also damaging our environment by making investments in fossil fuel and gas industries. UN needs to be aligned with its principles and stand against those profiting from disasters."

- Emilia Reyes, HLPF Session: Vision of Civil Society (July 12, 2022)

Jamaica recognizes importance of collaborating to help vulnerable

- "The CVSS (Council of Voluntary Social Services) is the umbrella organization representing Civil Society in Jamaica and we recognize that we must collaborate, volunteer, serve and support in order to create innovative ways to forge partnerships at the grassroots community levels.
- Together with the voice of vulnerable communities, by supporting public policies that protect human rights and create innovative opportunities so everyone can realize their potential.
- Capturing the data on hard-to-count, marginalized sub-groups of the population is therefore fundamental.
- Improving the quality resilience and use of data statistics for the measurement and implementation for the agenda is essential.
- CSOs can share perspectives and information based on qualitative and quantitative data gleaned. Data collected is to be collated, shared publicly with the help of statistical offices. The capacity-building of stakeholders to understand the purpose and process of data collection is critical.
- COVID-19 devastated small, open economies like Jamaica, but civil society, true to its values,

pushed forward with a collaborative national response, including the private sector and the government of Jamaica. A coordinated effort involving 62 NGOs, 1270 volunteers ensured that marginalized and vulnerable individuals benefited".

Mexico elaborates the value of CSO participation in multilateral fora

- "Mexico believes that active participation of CSO is extremely important when it comes to the multilateral fora. It's fundamental to be participants in these processes.
- For example, in our 3rd VNR in 2021, Mexico set up an intersectional committee with representation of civil society with CSOs having the responsibility of proposing ways of participating and ensuring the consultation with other bodies in civil society, so as to be able to involve them in the report.
- This was done with the language of these organizations, as was the case with other missions in societies in their languages.
- At present, with nuclei of CS in Mexico, we've seen clear follow-up of review mechanisms and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda in multilateral fora.
- Many of these are looking critically at the structural obstacles we have as an international group, in order to move towards a fair transition to sustainability.
- Mexico believes it is vital to continue to ensure that organized CS and non-organized CS continue to participate, particularly those who have been excluded until now from these things we want to bring in those who have been excluded, as providing indicators of economic situations of people in different ages."

“... the space for active and holistic involvement is very limited for CSOs at the UN platform as well as at the national level. Therefore, there is a need to create the policies, structure, financing and mechanism. In this context, may I propose that the ECOSOC President establishes a 10-member panel (5 Member-States & 5 Major Group members) with co-chairs from both Member States and CSOs. The terms of reference could include: to prepare a Mid-term Review Report on the current status of CSO participation and future recommendations; to institute a global conversation (international, regional, national and local) with CSOs and Member States and draw out best practices, noting the challenges and formulate future possibilities (enabling policies and mechanisms); to present a draft report at the July 2023 HLPF and a final report at the 2023 SDG Summit in Sept 2023 for adoption as new modalities for engagement.”

- Denison Jayasooria, HLPF Session: Vision of Civil Society (July 12, 2022)

OUR COMMON AGENDA

“Agenda of action designed to accelerate the implementation of existing agreements, including the Sustainable Development Goals. The report includes S-G’s key proposals across the 12 commitments from the Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations as well as proposed key moments. This report was in response to a request from UN Member States for a report-back with recommendations on how to move forward on current challenges.”

- Women's Major Group

Per President of General Assembly's letter on OCA

1. Accelerating and scaling up the SDGs, leaving no-one behind

Covers inter alia [proposals in chapters II and III of Our Common Agenda report, including] paragraphs 19 (social contract), 28 (fund for social protection), 29 (informal economy), 30 (World Social Summit), 31 (transformative gender measures), 32 (CSW), 34 (human rights mechanisms), 36 (legal identity), 46 (youth in politics), 47 (youth office, youth engagement), 49 (education summit), 51 (job creation), 80 (just transition) and 112 (UN Development System).

2. Accelerating the SDGs through sustainable financing and building trust

Covers inter alia [proposals in chapters II and III of Our Common Agenda report, including] paragraphs 21 (listening exercises), 23 (rule of law), 25 (tax and illicit financial flows), 26 (public information code of conduct), 35 (disinformation), 38 (GDP);73 (global economy, biennial G20-ECOSOC-SG-IFI summit), 74 (fairer trading system), 75 (financial integrity), 76 (sustainable business models) and 124 (UN budget).

3. Frameworks for a peaceful world – promoting peace, international law and digital cooperation

Covers inter alia [proposals in chapter IV of Our Common Agenda report, including paragraphs 89 (new agenda for peace), 91 (outer space), 93 (digital compact) and 127 (intergovernmental organs); [23] (rule of law), [34], (human rights mechanisms, Universal Periodic Review), 35 (application of human rights to frontier issues), [36] (legal identity), 96 (international law), 113 (UN support to social contract) and 129 (funding human rights mechanisms).

4. Protecting our planet and being prepared for the future

Covers inter alia [proposals in chapter IV of Our Common Agenda report, including] paragraphs 79 (climate finance), 82 (1.5 degrees), 83 (global stocktake), 85 (green finance), 86 (adaptation, territorial threats of climate change) and 87 (biodiversity); 54 (representing future generations), 56 (future impact/lab), 58 (Envoy for Future Generations), 59 (Declaration on Future Generations) and 125 (Trusteeship Council or alternative); and 100 (foresight), 101 (emergency platform), 103 (Summit of the Future), 67 (global vaccination plan), 68 (WHO), 69 (pandemic preparedness), 70 (access to health technologies) and 71 (universal health coverage).

5. Enhancing international cooperation

Covers inter alia [proposals in chapters IV and V of Our Common Agenda report, including]paragraphs 32 (CSW), 102 (High-Level Advisory Board), 111 (age, gender, diversity), 112 (governance and funding of development), 114 (recruitment), 117 (Scientific Advisory Board), 123 (UN 2.0) and 124 (UN budget), 126-128 (intergovernmental organs), [129] (funding human rights mechanisms); and 118 (regional organizations), 119 (local and regional governments, parliaments), 120 (private sector engagement and accountability), 121, 122 (civil society) and 130 (engagement of civil society and other stakeholders across intergovernmental organs.)