



Findings from the UNDG e-Discussion with Civil Society on Partnerships and Voluntary Commitments for the 2014 High-level Political Forum Session on Means of Implementation

Introduction

The United Nations Development Group (UNDG) is currently conducting the project “Continuing inclusive dialogue on the post-2015 development agenda,” which includes a component on “partnerships with civil society” focused on issues related to means of implementation for the post-2015 development agenda.

The “partnerships with civil society” dialogues involve an e-Discussion, national meetings and a global event, co-led by the UN Millennium Campaign (UNMC), UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS), UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Volunteers (UNV) Programme.

Detailed information is available at: <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/civilsociety2015>

As part of the e-Discussion, civil society has been invited to respond to one of the questions that will be discussed during the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) session on Means of Implementation for Sustainable Development:

“What can trigger new partnerships and voluntary commitments, and what can make them successful in advancing economic, social and environmental progress?”

Three key messages were conveyed:

1. Ensure that partnerships are fully inclusive and participatory, moving beyond consultations to comprehensive engagement;
2. Mandate economic, social and environmental safeguards in partnerships;
3. Expand the concept of public-private partnership to embrace cooperatives and social and solidarity economy actors.

1. Ensure that partnerships are fully inclusive and participatory, moving beyond consultations to comprehensive engagement

Contributors to the e-Discussion emphasized that partnerships for sustainable development must be fully inclusive, involving the full range of stakeholders: governments, the private sector, civil society, volunteer organizations, and other relevant contributors. Partnerships must move beyond economic, trade and technical assistance, and create people-to-people and community-wide linkages that go well beyond purely transactional relationships.

Real partnership means moving from consultation to truly inclusive and meaningful participation that encourages dialogue and enables dynamic influence. Mutual understanding, trust, and open communication are essential for success. Responses illustrated that partnerships with a highly

participatory methodology are often more durable, with longer lasting impacts on the economic, social and environmental progress of involved communities.

Community outreach and assessment are critical to build partnerships that can achieve sustainable development goals. Partnerships must prioritize the participation and foster the empowerment of people that are living in poverty, or have been otherwise marginalized. Contributors stressed in particular that the equal influence of women must be ensured.

Volunteerism was highlighted by contributors as a catalyst for new partnerships, particularly due to its role in implementation efforts. Volunteers can inspire others to become more involved in their own development and empowered to realize their rights, including through participating in decision-making. Education plays a key role in this regard by raising awareness of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. Some contributions called for volunteers to be recognized by local bodies, national governments and international policy makers, and their roles to be supported by an enabling environment. Attention was drawn to the role of international (including South-South and diaspora) volunteering as increasingly important to effective development cooperation, and as a platform for fostering constructive relationships between nations, communities and individuals and across cultures. One submission cautioned that the contribution of volunteers and volunteer groups must be surrounded with adequate protection measures to ensure that volunteers are not relied upon to substitute for paid workers.

One contributor underscored that multi-stakeholder partnerships must address inherent power imbalances and conflicts of interest between governments, business and civil society. Examples of ways to address this concern are presented in the next section.

2. Mandate economic, social and environmental safeguards in partnerships

To enable partnerships to be successful in advancing economic, social and environmental progress, they must be framed within a clear sustainable development mandate and incorporate mandatory safeguards, emphasized contributors.

Respondents to the e-Discussion identified that in the current mainstream discourse on means of implementation, much emphasis is placed on the role of public-private partnerships (PPPs), usually understood as partnerships with the corporate sector. Contributions stressed that partnerships with the corporate sector must enhance productivity and competitiveness in partner countries and add value to productive sectors. The role of the private sector should not undermine the policy space of the State to design its development path.

One contributor cautioned that the use of public resources to leverage private sector investment should not be prioritized over investment in national education and health programmes, which support development needs most directly. Furthermore, most of these public financial resources do not reach small and medium enterprises (SMEs), where the bulk of hiring and production occurs in many developing and low-income countries. SMEs should thus be deliberately distinguished from other types of firms and enterprises, particularly transnational corporations, and specific support measures and policies should be applied to SMEs.

Respondents also emphasized that PPPs should be governed by a legislative framework that safeguards the rights of citizens and respects internationally agreed human rights standards at all stages, including during the policy formulation, monitoring and accountability phases. This requires

ensuring that human rights standards are applied to the business sector, and that corporate social responsibility is mandatory. The business sector must regularly and publicly report on its investments' environmental and human rights impacts, and identify steps to mitigate the risks. States must fully comply with the Extra Territorial Obligations described in the [Maastricht Principles](#) to ensure the primacy of human rights and accountability of transnational companies.

3. Expand the concept of public-private partnership to embrace cooperatives and social and solidarity economy actors

Several contributors added that in order to trigger new and successful partnerships, the concept of PPPs must be expanded beyond profit-oriented economic actors to embrace additional private sector actors – particularly cooperatives, community-owned enterprises and other social and solidarity economy (SSE) organizations. Contributors explained that SSE enterprises pursue the goal of public well-being while providing goods and services. Such enterprises are models for adaptable delivery of sustainable development goals. They are people-centred and well-suited to satisfy critical needs, generate wealth and equitably redistribute it to local communities. SSE enterprises have created and maintained decent jobs even during times of economic crisis. But to realize their full potential, they must be scaled up through new forms of PPPs.

The global SSE movement has prepared a [set of recommendations](#) for the post-2015 development agenda, including calls for: national legislative frameworks to support SSE finance initiatives; access to knowledge, innovation, capacity building and capital; public policies that explicitly recognize SSE as a development strategy; and laws and international agreements orienting public procurements to prioritize SSE products and services.

All responses may be found at: <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/civilsociety2015>

Contributors:

Organizations

Arab NGO Network for Development
Development Generation Africa International
International Co-operative Alliance
International Movement ATD Fourth World
MGCY 10yfp focal point for Asia
Kehkashan Basu, Global Coordinator for Children and Youth
RIPESS - International Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy
Third World Network
Volunteer Service Abroad (NZ)
VSO International

Individuals

Alvin Leong: Research Fellow
Priya Desai: Social Worker
Victor Osei Kwadwo: Student/Youth Activist