

# Towards a Global Civil Society Platform on Sustainable Development Action Plan

December 2015

## The journey so far

During the course of 2015, our leaders and governments have committed themselves to several agreements that have the potential to shape the future of people and planet over the next few decades. While there are mixed views in civil society about whether the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change are ambitious enough, almost everyone agrees that civil society needs to play an active role in keeping the spotlight on these commitments, working on implementation, and holding our leaders to account for the promises they have made.

Civil society has mobilized in a variety of ways in recent years to influence the post-2015 process and climate negotiations. Whether it was organizing on policy and advocacy through [Beyond 2015](#) and other platforms, or mobilizing on the streets through [action/2015](#) or the [Global Climate March](#), civil society has kept up the pressure in recent years.

Over the last 12 months, numerous civil society organisations and activists who have been involved in these initiatives have started to turn their attention to what comes next. Discussions of how civil society should organize and mobilise around international agreements on sustainable development were held in Tunis (April), Addis Ababa (July), New York (September) and Paris (December). In addition, a virtual community was created on the [Loomio](#) platform to discuss priorities and options, and several online interactions were organized. Finally, a Transitional Steering Group – consisting of several individuals from a diverse range of civil society backgrounds – was asked to provide guidance on what sort of mechanism would serve the best interests of civil society in the coming years.

This process revealed that there was widespread enthusiasm to harness the positive energy that has been created through civil society initiatives of recent years and **build a strong and inclusive global platform to connect and support civil society activities on sustainable development at all levels (local, national, regional and global).**

It was felt that a new global platform would add value to civil society in at least three important ways.

First, there has been much interest in a space for **sharing information** on the sustainable development agenda across issues and across countries. It was felt that civil society needs to better understand the agenda, be better equipped to engage with decision-makers on

development of national plans and strategies, and inform their constituencies. Better information sharing could improve coordination within civil society and reduce the risk of duplication between civil society initiatives. It would provide a space to share resources and strategies for advocacy, policy, programmes and mobilisation and facilitate collaboration amongst civil society actors. This would also enable civil society to push for more policy coherence on governments and donor plans/strategies (e.g. climate mitigation, adaptation, and development plans).

Secondly, there have also been clear calls to **redress the imbalance in capacity** within civil society itself, especially between well-resourced CSOs and the rest. Whereas previous initiatives and campaigns have relied on time-limited interventions in country, and regular engagement at the global UN level, the new initiative will involve a reversal of emphasis to the regional, national and local level. Importantly, implementation and accountability will largely happen at the local, national and regional levels. Effective engagement in advocacy and campaigning for full and ambitious implementation of the goals will be strengthened with better equipped partners (in terms of organisational structures and people capacity) at the national and regional level, particularly in the Global South.

Thirdly, there was also a recognition that whatever comes next should represent **a step change** in the ways that civil society organises and mobilises around this agenda. Some key objectives highlighted in conversations so far have included:

- Finding better ways to **connect across issues**, especially between those who have hitherto been engaged in organising around development and climate change. Any new initiative cannot be seen to be a legacy of one or other perspective, but instead represent a new, inclusive start.
- Thoughtfully incorporating the **lessons learned** from the civil society platforms created in recent years, including paying heed to the recommendations in any evaluations carried out.
- Paying more attention to **engaging and enabling citizens** in deepening their participation around sustainable development institutions and processes, especially at the local and national levels.
- Ensuring that whatever is created is **truly universal**, engaging a broad range of civil society actors across the world in a shared movement to build a just and sustainable world.
- Reaching out to **broader civil society actors**, such as trade unions, constituency groups (e.g women, youth, people with disabilities, indigenous), environmental and climate change organisations and wider social movements.
- Recognising that civil society's role will go beyond advocacy and campaigning, and into playing our rightful part in the **implementation** of the commitments on sustainable development.
- That civil society needs to come together not just to create a neutral platform or space, but to do so on the basis of a **transformative vision** of the just and sustainable world we want.

- We need an initiative that works to strengthen the links between participating civil society organisations around the world and **provides support and resources** to enable CSOs, particularly from the global South and those most affected by poverty and injustice, to effectively participate in follow-up and implementation of sustainable development commitments.
- Whatever we create will inevitable be globally constituted, but should build on and **add value to local and national initiatives** of civil society.
- We have the opportunity to **transform the spaces for dialogue and participation in intergovernmental processes**, for example around ensuring meaningful civil society inputs into the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

## Key Activities

Four priority areas for joint activity have emerged in conversations so far:

### 1. Implementation

It is becoming clear that, in many cases and in many countries, civil society will play a critical role in implementing the sustainable development agenda. Whether it is delivering the initiatives to tackle poverty or pioneering carbon reduction activities, civil society is already playing a leadership role. With governments struggling to find the resources to deliver the agenda and with the private sector unlikely to play its part without pressure, civil society is already convening at the national, regional and global levels around our role in the implementation agenda.

Examples of activities.

- Global online platform to share information about national government policies, regional strategies, global processes. The platform content would be updated weekly with information from national, regional and global platforms/organisations. It would signpost users to key civil society activities and coalitions related to the SDGs.
- Sharing good practice on implementation at the national level between key networks so that civil society in different countries learns from each other at this critical phase of implementation.
- Supporting civil society in understanding and identifying their role in national platforms such as National Sustainable Development Councils.
- Supporting civil society in convening multi-stakeholder initiatives around different aspects of the sustainable development agenda.

## **2. Monitoring and accountability**

There are a growing number of civil society groups that want to work towards ensuring that there is effective monitoring of implementation of the SDGs. This includes defining clear indicators, national action plans and empowering citizens to hold their governments and private sector to account. There are clear links here to the important work being done around open data and those involved in participatory democracy and open policy-making. This new initiative could serve as a global clearinghouse for civil society to share information and resources about data, monitoring and accountability around sustainable development. Further, there is interest in developing joint resources to support the monitoring of commitments and the creation of accessible tools to enable citizens to monitor implementation.

### Examples of activities

- Connecting civil society actors working on data and monitoring across countries and themes.
- Identifying data gaps in areas that are identified as important by civil society (e.g. on groups at risk of being left behind) and developing a strategy for addressing those gaps.
- Signposting to technical support and expert advice to develop data gathering methods and citizen engagement strategies.
- Support for national and regional monitoring of implementation, including coordinated shadow reporting e.g. specific thematic groups to share learning across countries.

## **3. Policy coordination**

The majority of organisations engaged so far have expressed an interest to keep engaging in joint policy and advocacy. There is a clear need and demand from a number of civil society bodies to continue the successful work to shape and influence the agenda at the UN, building on the work during the post-2015 sustainable development process; to continue to maintain pressure from civil society on the implementation, monitoring and review phases.

### Examples of activities

- Regular policy briefings and other joint resources to support advocacy work - e.g. template resources such as talking points and press releases.
- Enable civil society groups to be better equipped to engage with decision-makers on development of national plans and strategies, and inform their constituencies.
- Develop partnerships and work on joint CSO positions to show unity and common push for action on leaders, especially on policy coherence (e.g. climate mitigation, adaptation, and development plans).

- Provide advocacy and lobbying expertise on behalf of members to ensure effective representation and advocacy during formal UN process, including feeding into Major Groups around the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) process and other relevant channels such as UNFCCC and ICPD.
- Offline meeting spaces including annual meeting(s), possibly linked to the HLPF to share latest knowledge and awareness at national, regional and/or global (New York) level. This could include sharing resources for national/regional civil society to facilitate their own annual meetings.

#### 4. Public mobilisation

While it was generally felt that global public mobilisation around the sustainable development agenda was unlikely to be a priority in the next few years, there were nevertheless mobilisation possibilities on cross-cutting issues such as inequality or on particular issues at the national level. This could complement the work done around policy and advocacy, as well as monitoring and accountability. This could also help to engage constituency and support bases in the coming years, something that will become increasingly important around key monitoring moments (e.g. in 2020 for the Paris Agreement).

##### Examples of activities

- Encourage civil society to adopt a broad, cross-cutting theme to promote engagement of various actors around a common vision e.g. “leave no one behind”
- Coordinate (global) public mobilisation around key moments on thematic areas, such as climate change, oceans, access to clean water etc.
- Host a public-facing website that would signpost action opportunities provided by participating organisations.
- Capacity-building of actors to strengthen campaigning skills and capacity and enable broader engagement and easier activation when mobilization moments occur

#### Next steps

Conscious of the need to build a broad-based movement and of the need to strike an effective balance between pausing to draw lessons and retaining the momentum, the following four global civil society networks have agreed to work together to oversee the next steps in building this new global platform on sustainable development:

- [CIVICUS](#) is the world alliance for citizen participation which has members in more than 170 countries and has incubated previous initiatives such as action/2015 and GCAP.
- [Climate Action Network International](#) (CAN) is a worldwide network of over 950 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in over 110 countries working to promote

government and individual action to limit human-induced climate change to ecologically sustainable levels.

- [Global Call to Action Against Poverty](#) (GCAP) is a global civil society movement calling for an end to poverty and inequality, with national coalitions in 85 countries and regional coordination in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Caribbean and Europe.
- [International Forum of National NGO Platforms](#) (IFP/FIP) is a network of 64 national development NGO platforms and 6 regional NGO coalitions from 5 continents.

These four global networks will continue to work with numerous regional and national networks, as well as individual organisations and activists, to help define, implement and build support for a new civil society initiative around sustainable development.

The following steps and timetable have been agreed:

- Continue to use the [Loomio](#) platform to conduct an open, transparent discussion on what should come next and host working group discussions. We will also start incorporating long-term resources (e.g. case studies of SDG implementation and monitoring, examples of good practice) in the site.
- From January 2016 encourage national and regional partners to convene physical and/or virtual conversations to identify priorities and opportunities for joint working.
- From January 2016, a number of working groups will be convened to work on key aspects of the design and functioning of the new initiative. See list in next section.
- In late February 2016, a meeting of those engaged in this process so far will be convened (venue to be confirmed) to reflect on lessons learned from the evaluations of Beyond2015, action/2015 and others, consider the recommendations from the working groups, and agree key features of the platform, eg. Name, governance and next steps.
- Between March and July 2016, work will continue in earnest on raising resources to support the initiative, building its online presence and membership base, conducting relevant elections and recruitments, etc.
- Convene a meeting amongst those taking part in the International Civil Society Week in Bogota, Colombia (24-28 April 2016), where some 700 civil society leaders from around the world are expected, to promote the platform.
- Launch the new initiative formally in New York around the High Level Political Forum (11-20 July 2016).

## Working Groups

In the coming 6 months, we will continue the 3 functional working groups to support the establishment of the platform until July 2016. There will also be an activity working group to enable sharing of good practice around each of the major activity areas listed above.

These working groups are open to any civil society organization and ensure an inclusive process of decision-making.

**Activity Engagement Working Group: 1. Implementation; 2. Monitoring & accountability; 3. Policy coordination; 4. Public mobilisation**

**Functional Working Groups:**

**a) Outreach & communications**

This working group focuses on outreach work and communications- it aims to define outreach and communications priorities, including the branding, visual identity and specific messages from the initiative. Another task for the group will be to oversee the development of a dedicated website for the initiative.

We are currently exploring opportunities for branding of the new initiative and there are a number of opportunities to have your view on the visual identity and communications of the group. Upcoming questions to be finalised include:

- The branding of the initiative
- The development of the website

**b) Resourcing & projects**

This working group considers how we can provide resources to enable this initiative to deliver on the activities set out above. The group aims to consider how to provide resources for national and regional engagement, as well as global coordination.

This will include:

- How do we finance this coordination activity?
- Are there upcoming project opportunities?
- Would organisations be able to provide support in kind, such as capacity development or network support?

**c) Governance & membership**

This working group is focused on defining the governance architecture of the new platform, it will set out a clear and inclusive process for accountability and election of a leadership group to be established by July 2016.

The group will consider issues such as:

- In order to facilitate this process what would be a good model of governance? What would be the structure of a governance committee or a reference group?
- Should this initiative establish a separate legal entity or a consortium?
- Should we focus on thematic or regional clustering or both? Should we have focal points to coordinate activities on thematic and/or regional clusters?

## Further Information

Please visit the Loomio website and join the group here:

<https://www.loomio.org/g/uJd5wTXQ/global-civil-society-platform-on-sustainable-development>

For further information please email: [CSOSDGs@gmail.com](mailto:CSOSDGs@gmail.com)