

2018 ECOSOC Special Meeting

“Towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all”

Wednesday, 23 May 2018

Concept Note

Background

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Heads of State and Government recognized that fostering inclusive societies based on strong and transparent institutions is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. Building sustainable and inclusive societies is a crosscutting endeavour, essential to the achievement of all SDGs, including SDG5 on gender equality, SDG8 on decent work and economic growth, SDG10 on reduced inequalities, SDG11 on sustainable cities and communities, SDG13 on climate action and SDG16 on peace, justice and strong institutions

The 2030 Agenda also commits States to strengthen inclusive and participatory approaches to the implementation, follow-up and review of the SDGs. This will require raising awareness of the SDGs, improving outreach and forging enhanced cooperation among all citizens and relevant development stakeholders from civil society and the private sector.

Several targets across the 17 SDGs reflect the universal commitment to foster sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation. For example, Target 1.4 seeks to ensure, by 2030, that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources. Target 4.5 strives to eliminate gender disparities in education by 2030 and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations. Target 9.C identifies access to information and communications technology as important for the achievement of SDG9. And Target 11.3 seeks to enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries. There is the recognition that achieving these targets will require a strong, universal partnership between governments, international organisations, civil society and the private sector. In particular, measures to foster participation and inclusion need to be substantive, long-term and systematic in nature, rather than nominally participatory or organised on an ad hoc basis.

These and other SDG targets reflect the multifaceted nature of sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies, requiring policy action and innovation in areas such as economic empowerment, education, inclusion, gender equality and strengthened transparency in governance and institutions. Current research underscores the importance of policy action and innovation in these priority areas. Studies have shown several pathways for fostering participation and transparency in institutions, including through e-governance and open data to foster citizen participation at city, local and national levels¹

¹ See e.g. Estevez, E. & Janowski, T. (2013) Electronic Governance for Sustainable Development — Conceptual framework and state of research, Government Information Quarterly.

as well as pro-poor and gender-sensitive policy frameworks implemented by several countries. New technologies, particularly in ICT can be instrumental in driving this change. Other studies have highlighted the importance of economic empowerment through small and medium-size enterprise development for inclusive growth and the participation of women and vulnerable groups in society². It should be also emphasized that participatory approaches are not only vital for achieving sustainable development and robust and inclusive societies. As recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and further codified in international human rights treaties, equal participation in political and public affairs is also a human right which must be respected and protected; not merely an optional or discretionary principle. It is therefore desirable to build on the recent initiatives launched within the human rights fora.

The prevailing global landscape confirms the universal importance of advancing inclusive, sustainable and resilient societies. Developed and developing countries alike will benefit from a strengthened social compact based on inclusiveness. Fostering participation of all and enhancing social cohesion and stability by achieving the 2030 Agenda is an indispensable building block for sustainable development.

ECOSOC Special Meeting and preparatory meetings

To explore further collective action in addressing issues of participation and inclusion within the context of the 2030 Agenda, H.E. Marie Chatardová, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic, President of ECOSOC, will hold an ECOSOC Special Meeting at UN Headquarters in May 2018. The Special Meeting is complemented and informed by a preparatory meeting and a series of breakfast meetings with different stakeholder groups, jointly convened by the Permanent Mission of the Czech Republic and the Permanent Mission of Colombia.

The preparatory meeting, held in Prague, Czech Republic in March 2018, provides a platform for Member States and stakeholders to discuss the critical role of stakeholder participation, good governance and strong and inclusive institutions for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda as well as to identify pathways to strengthen institutional frameworks for increased participation. The meeting showcases best practices, highlighting the positive impact of participation on sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies. Positive practices and case studies are drawn from a wide range of country contexts and sectors, including education, economic development and good governance.

Several critical findings have emerged from the preparatory breakfast meetings: The breakfast meeting with NGOs highlighted the critical role that civil society organizations can play as amplifiers of the 2030 Agenda at all levels and the need for institutionalized platforms of engagement for all relevant groups. The breakfast meeting with local government representatives underlined that local governments are ideally placed to support Agenda implementation by responding to local needs, catalysing local innovation and promoting a territorial approach to development. The breakfast meeting with the private sector emphasized the need for strategies to incentivize private sector engagement for the SDGs, including by encouraging a “race to the top” with regards to sustainability.

² See e.g. Kabeer, N. (2012) Women’s economic empowerment and inclusive growth: labour markets and enterprise development, CDPR Discussion Paper.

And finally, the breakfast meeting with academia highlighted the necessity to strengthen the interface between academia and policy makers to devise actionable policy recommendations, informed by evidence, to foster sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies.

The overall meeting schedule of the initiative is as follows:

- Four Informal breakfast meetings, convened jointly by the Czech Republic and Colombia, in New York:
 - ✓ 27 November 2017: Breakfast Meeting with NGOs
 - ✓ 11 January 2018: Breakfast Meeting with Local Government Representatives
 - ✓ 24 January 2018: Breakfast Meeting with Private Sector
 - ✓ 9 March 2018: Breakfast Meeting with Academia

- Preparatory meeting in the Czech Republic (26-27 March 2018)
- ECOSOC Special Meeting, New York (23 May 2018)

Key objectives

The objectives of the Special Meeting include the following:

- Highlight the benefits of participatory and inclusive development approaches and understanding of the linkages between participation, society, institutions to ensure that no one is left behind;
- Promote partnerships for policy action and foster cooperation among all relevant stakeholders to foster participation through innovative approaches, particularly of vulnerable groups;
- Share knowledge, experiences and innovative approaches on increasing participation, inclusiveness and transparency in public policy and governance at national, regional and global levels;
- Advance recommendations for the ECOSOC system's role in providing policy guidance for building inclusive, peaceful and resilient societies to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Scope of the discussions

The preparatory meeting, held in the Czech Republic in March 2018, focuses on the institutional requirements for successfully implementing the SDGs, including through civil participation and engagement. The meeting also showcases novel approaches to foster inclusiveness and transparency in governance.

The Special Meeting in New York in May 2018 will represent the culmination of discussions on the broader issue of sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies in the context of the 2030 Agenda. The Meeting will integrate the insights from the preparatory meetings into a set of comprehensive recommendations for policy action at all levels. It will also provide a forum for the exchange of positive practices and lessons learned from national experiences in fostering sustainable, resilient and inclusive

societies that can inform policy making by other Member States and highlight avenues for UN system support.

Format and participation

The Special Meeting, to be held on 23 May 2018, will be a one-day event convened and chaired by the ECOSOC President for 2017-2018 cycle. It will have high-level participation, including through keynote speakers and interactive discussions between policy makers and experts from academia, the private sector, civil society and multilateral organizations. Government representatives will be invited to participate as well as stakeholders from Civil Society, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector and research institutions.

Outcome

The outcome of the Special Meeting will be a President's Summary, which will be used as an input for the 2018 ECOSOC substantive session and the 2018 High-level Political Forum, held under the auspices of ECOSOC.

UN system support

Through its Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development (OISC), UN DESA will coordinate the preparations for the Special Meeting and its preparatory meetings. Other UN entities have also been engaged in providing support to the ECOSOC Special Meeting.
