

2018 ECOSOC Special Meeting

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

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 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

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

inclusive growth and the participation of women and vulnerable groups in society². A consistent finding across sectors and interventions meant to foster inclusion is that participation which is nominal or ad hoc in nature—with little substance, structure or long-term commitment—is unsustainable and can undermine efforts.

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.

Amidst a growing momentum for inclusive policies that foster participation, several global trends appear to challenge the implementation of such frameworks. Rising inequalities in a majority of countries across the globe have undermined social cohesion and universal participation in economic, social and political life. Popular reaction to shifts in global manufacturing and trade, together with migration trends, threaten to undermine commitments to global normative solutions. At the same time, the protracted nature of conflicts around the world has renewed the focus on the linkages between institutions, peace and sustainable development.

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, proposes to hold an ECOSOC Special Meeting at UN Headquarters in May 2018. The Special Meeting will be complemented and informed by one preparatory meeting. This preparatory meeting would reflect the universal nature of efforts to foster inclusion and participation for sustainable development and bring discussions on the issues into the realm of ECOSOC.

The preparatory meeting, to be held in the Czech Republic in March 2018, will include Member States and stakeholders. It will introduce case studies, stress the positive impact of participation on sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies, and cover a broad field from economic empowerment to good governance. The meeting will also explore the potential of new technologies and ICT-based innovations to expand transparency and inclusion.

Countries from other regions would also be encouraged to organize preparatory activities to bring their perspectives to the Special Meeting. The preparatory meetings will be preceded by informal breakfast meeting discussions in New York, jointly convened by the Permanent Mission of the Czech Republic and the Permanent Mission of Colombia.

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

Each breakfast meeting will involve a specific group of stakeholders: The November breakfast meeting will bring together approximately 15 NGO representatives, the December meeting 15 officials from local government, the January meeting 15 private sector representatives and the February meeting 15 experts from academia. For each of the breakfast meetings, invitations will also be extended to up to 20 Permanent Representatives and/or Deputy Permanent Representatives from UN Member States, seeking to engage the entire ECOSOC Membership (of 54 member States) over the cycle of the four breakfast meetings. The breakfast meetings will be held alternately at the Bohemia National Hall (321 E 73rd St, New York, NY 10021) and the Permanent Mission of Colombia (140 E 57th St #5, New York, NY 10022) from 8.30am to 9.45am.

The proposed meeting schedule would be:

- Four Informal breakfast meetings, New York (November 2017-February 2018)
 - ✓ November 2017: Breakfast Meeting with NGOs
 - ✓ December 2017: Breakfast Meeting with Local Government Representatives
 - ✓ January 2018: Breakfast Meeting with Private Sector
 - ✓ February 2018: Breakfast Meeting with Academia
- Preparatory meeting in the Czech Republic (March 2018) convened jointly by the Czech Republic and Colombia
- ECOSOC Special Meeting, New York (May 2018)

Key objectives

The objectives of the series of events 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 to foster participation through innovative approaches, including e-governance, smart cities and the empowerment of women and vulnerable groups, such as socially disadvantaged persons;
- 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, to be held in the Czech Republic in March 2018, will focus on the institutional requirements for successfully implementing the SDGs, including through civil participation and engagement. The meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss novel approaches to foster inclusiveness and transparency in governance, particularly through ICT-based innovations such as e-governance, e-institutions and open data, which have been pioneered in several countries, both at national and municipal levels. Early experiences have highlighted the potential of implementing ICT-based innovations and accessible data solutions in the policy sphere to strengthen transparency and citizens' ownership in

priority setting. The meeting will explore the scope for countries to develop, apply and adapt these innovative approaches in different country contexts to foster sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies and advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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 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 in 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. Additional outcomes from the Special Meeting could include recommendations for further analysis and concrete follow-up actions to be taken to support sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies and foster participation of all.

UN system support

Through its Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination (OESC), UN DESA will coordinate the preparations for the Special Meeting and its preparatory meetings. Other UN entities that could be engaged in organizing and support the ECOSOC Special Meeting are the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UN Regional Commissions and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).
