



## Webinar Series: **Role of the Regional Sustainable Development Forums in ensuring open and inclusive SDG monitoring**

The monitoring of delivery of the SDGs requires accountability at many levels from the local and national, to the regional and global forums. Increasingly the regional forums are being held up as a crucial point in the review cycle to ensure comparison and effective peer learning. Many participants have highlighted the role of regional forums as being a more open space for dialogue between civil society and governments; as well as more dynamic spaces for collaboration and learning.

This year, the Africa Regional Forum went ahead in Zimbabwe on 24-28 February and the UNECE Regional Forum took place in a virtual format on 19 March and UNESCAP Regional Forums has also shifted to a virtual format but other regional forums have been postponed due to coronavirus.

In this webinar series we heard from key coordinators involved over recent years in the regional forums and had a discussion on recommendations on how to further strengthen these forums.

### **First Webinar: 6<sup>th</sup> April ENGLISH speaking: 0900 NY/ 1300 GMT / 1400 UK/ 1830 Delhi**

- Welcome & Introduction: Oli Henman, Action for Sustainable Development (3 minutes):

We are now in the second cycle of follow up and review and we had been intending to focus on the 'Decade of Action', however the sudden impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has led to massive challenges around the world as health and social systems struggle to respond to the demand.

Many of the Regional Forums have been scaled down this year but we must ensure that civil society voices continue to be heard at UN meetings.

- **UNECE regional forum** (8 mins): Hanna Gunnarsson, Women Engage for a Common Future (WECEF) & Women's Major Group - the regional coordination mechanism and the virtual forum in 2020

The Regional Civil society Engagement Mechanism (RCEM) has been built over recent years and includes:

- a) 14 self-identified Constituency Groups: Women, Children and Youth, Indigenous Peoples, Non-Governmental Organizations, Workers and Trade Unions, Scientific and Technological Community, Small scale Food Producers, Persons with disability, Diaspora/migrants, LGBTIQ, Urban poor, Older persons, Small and medium enterprises, Civil society FfD group. But there is space for unrepresented interest groups to self-organise and apply for membership.
- b) 8 sub-regional geographic groups (based on the UNECE river basins): Baltic Sea; Black Sea; Caspian Sea; Caucasus; Central Asia; Eastern Europe; Mediterranean/South Eastern Europe; USA, Canada, Israel



This year the meeting took place in a virtual format- there was a full day CSO Forum online with extensive interactive participation (190 registered and various different people joined throughout the day, with a maximum participation at one time being 84). This was followed by a half day official UNECE Virtual RFSD in which participation was more limited.

- **Africa regional forum** (8 mins): Stephen Chacha, Africa Philanthropy Foundation- the development of the regional coordination mechanism and civil society engagement

In the Africa region, there has been an extensive consultation process over recent years to agree on a regional coordination mechanism.

This was finalised and agreed in person at the 6<sup>th</sup> Africa Regional Forum in Zimbabwe on 24-28 Feb, with a full day CSO Forum which culminated with the agreed action plan set out in the Victoria Falls Declaration. The meeting was well attended and there were a wide range of side events hosted by CSOs throughout the forum.

The regional coordination mechanism includes the following:

- a) 15 constituency groups: Women; Children and Youth; NGOs; Farmers; Indigenous Peoples; Academia; Volunteers; Ageing; People with Disability; Business and Industry; Scientific and Technological Community; Fisherfolk; People Living with HIV; SMEs; Workers and Trade Unions.
  - b) 5 sub-regional representatives from: Southern Africa; Eastern Africa; Central Africa; West Africa; and North Africa.
- **Asia Pacific regional forum** (8 mins): Jyotsna Mohan Singh, Asia Development Alliance- the regional coordination mechanism and virtual engagement in 2020

The Asia region was the first to establish a Regional Coordination Mechanism and this has already been in full operation since 2016, building on earlier coordination which had happened in the build up to the agreement of the SDGs in 2015.

The regional coordination mechanism has grown to include:

- a) 18 constituency groups: Women; Children & youth; NGOs; Indigenous Peoples; Local authorities; Farmers; Science & Technology; SMEs; Trade Unions & workers; Older groups; Persons with disabilities; Fisherfolks; Urban poor; Migrants; LGBTIQ; People living with and affected by HIV; People affected by conflict & disaster; Dalits
- b) 5 sub-regional representatives from: Central Asia; East Asia; Pacific; South Asia; Southeast Asia.

This year 2020, there was no physical meeting due to the Covid pandemic but instead there have been a series of online workshops/webinars over the month of March. There have been some useful opportunities to engage and a wide range of CSO voices have been able to speak on these webinars, so it will be important to draw out the good practice in terms of ensuring wide participation for future online engagement.



- **Recommendations for Improvement** (8 mins): Deirdre de Burca, Forus, how to further strengthen the role of regional forums in the future
  - a) Missed Opportunities

UN regional follow-up and review processes are currently under-used in terms of promoting effective SDG implementation.

They should provide opportunities for the assessment of regional challenges and for the development of shared regional targets.

They should also facilitate dialogue, share lessons learned and identify current and past good practice from countries presenting VNRs from the region

- b) Strengthening stakeholder engagement

Sufficient funding should be provided to enable representatives of stakeholder groups to participate in official regional meetings

At the regional level, civil society should also be properly resourced to organize itself across subnational, national and sub-regional boundaries.

Multi-annual funding should be provided to resource permanent secretariats for the new Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanisms.

- c) Multi-stakeholder partnerships

Regional Sustainable Development Exchange & Learning Hubs Regional SD exchange and learning hubs should be resourced and established in each region in which diverse stakeholders can participate and develop their capacities to promote more effective 2030 Agenda monitoring and implementation across each region

Opportunities should be provided for the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships at the regional and national levels.

- d) Outcomes of Regional SD Forums

A much greater focus should be placed on the outcomes and summary reports of the UN regional sustainable development follow-up and review mechanisms.

The summary reports should form an important element of the discussions at the HLPF, including key presentations at the official sessions, as well as sharing amongst the MGoS and the interministerial discussions,

The findings of the regional summary reports should be reflected in the political declaration that is the main outcome of the HLPF.



**Second Webinar: 7<sup>th</sup> April FRENCH speaking: 1000 NY/ 1400 GMT/ 1500 Kinshasa/ 1600 Brussels**

- Welcome & Introduction: Oli Henman, Action for Sustainable Development (5 minutes)
- **MENA regional forum** (10 minutes): Zahra Bazzi, Arab NGO Network for Development- civil society engagement with UN ESCWA regional forum

The Arab Regional Forum offers limited direct engagement of civil society but ANND, together with other key CSO partners have established a CSO pre-meeting before the forum each year to coordinate across key stakeholders and present independent findings.

This includes: Representatives from national NGO coalitions; women's organisations; trade unions; disability organisations; and transparency & accountability organisations.

A key concern in the region is the impact of the Covid pandemic in terms of those communities who are already excluded. The government response in the region has not been inclusive of CSOs and a number of additional authoritarian measures are being introduced as part of the emergency measures linked to the response to the Covid pandemic.

It is essential to continue the work of monitoring government policy in terms of social and environmental impact as well as the follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda. It will be important to ensure that the aims of a more just and sustainable future are not lost due to the massive disruption caused by the pandemic.

Much of this monitoring must now take place online- there is a focus by CSOs in organising a review via online questionnaires and webinars.

- **Perspective of Africa Regional Forum** (10 minutes): Oumar Sow, GCAP Senegal- civil society engagement with UN ECA regional forum

The engagement of civil society varies across Africa. In terms of the VNRs, at the national level there are 3 main ways that CSOs engage: a) position papers on specific themes; b) alternative reports; c) 'contribution' reports which provide a CSO perspective into an overall 'whole of society' national report.

At the regional level, there is now the Regional Coordination Mechanism and there is at least one representative for each sub-region, so all CSOs are welcome to engage with their representatives.

Insights from regional partners including: Julien Agbessi, Abakar, Sossouga Dosse; There were a wide range of views expressed on the balance between independent reports and contributions to official government reports. In some cases it can be beneficial to integrate views into an official report but it is also extremely helpful to ensure an independent view is maintained and robust questions should be asked in terms of national implementation.



**Third Webinar: 8<sup>th</sup> April SPANISH speaking: 0900 Bogotá/ 1000 NY/ 1400 GMT/ 1600 Brussels**

- Welcome & Introduction: Oli Henman, Action for Sustainable Development (5 minutes)
- **Latin America & the Caribbean regional forum** (10 minutes): Laura Becerra, Equipo Pueblo-civil society engagement with UN ECLAC regional forum

Regional participation mechanism was discussed over several years and agreed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regional Forum in Chile, April 2019.

The regional mechanism includes the following groups:

- 16 Thematic Groups: Women; Children & Youth; Indigenous Peoples; Networks, organisations and platforms of NGOs; Trade unions & workers; Education, academia, science & technology; Older persons; Persons with disabilities; People living with and affected by HIV; LGBTIQ; Small farmers, rural and coastal communities; Human Rights defenders; Migrants; Afro-descendants; Ecological & environmental justice group; Solidarity economy group
- 4 sub-regions: Andes; Southern Cone; Central America, Mexico & Spanish-speaking Caribbean; Anglo & Francophone Caribbean

There is a recognition that participation in the VNR process at national level remains very limited, so Latin American CSOs have been demanding better space to discuss the VNRs at the regional forum. There should be financial support for the secretariat of the regional mechanism.

It is also a key request from Latin American CSOs to consider as part of the strengthening of the HLPF to include a close link to the Financing for Development and also Development Effectiveness dialogues; as well as space for greater South-South cooperation.

This year, 2020, the Covid pandemic is putting immense strain on all the societies and economies of Latin America. In terms of the regional forum it was proposed that there should be a virtual forum on 31 March but this was cancelled due to technical challenges.

Latin American CSOs continue to demand an ongoing dialogue to identify ways forward to ensure a just and sustainable future, it is essential to move towards a horizontal dialogue that includes civil society voices to find a way forward that supports all parts of society.

Insights from regional partners including: Agustina Carpio & Marcela Browne, Pampa 2030, Argentina; Maria Jose Libertino; Alessandra Nilo, Brasil; Iris, UNITAS: The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a deepening crisis in the region, which was already very difficult after the rise of increasingly populist governments. There has been a lack of coordination across the region and there are massive gaps in healthcare which are likely to lead to even greater casualties. Civil society has a key role to play in overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2030 Agenda should be the blueprint for more healthy societies, this requires a shift in development paradigm. It will also be critical to ensure a closer link between the regional and global level advocacy.