



## Meeting 4 Summary

### Participation and Representation: Better Connecting “We the Peoples” to the Multilateral System

27 September 2022

#### Framing Remarks and Normative Context:

- Multilateralism works only if the people of the world believe in it and are able to engage with it.
- Civil society (CS) participation strengthens the effectiveness of government.
- UN engagement with CS must improve on two dimensions: tweaks to the current system that can make a difference, and new approaches that may be better suited to this moment in history.
- The founders of the UN had vision beyond the present. When thinking about *Our Common Agenda* (OCA), we also need to be thinking 75 years into the future
- The vision of OCA is promising, but realities are far from it. Implementation is needed.
- Putting people at the center would mean redesigning the core of systems. Visionary and expert architects would be needed to create new infrastructure
- There is currently a notable openness to reform at the UN.

#### Proposals from Civil Society actors

- A **UN Parliamentary Assembly** would ensure more involvement of citizens and their representatives in the UN. It could be established by vote of the General Assembly under Article 22; no Charter amendment required. Its members could be elected directly or appointed by national parliaments. It could start as a consultative body, giving recommendations to the GA and UNSC.
- A **UN Advisory Board of Local and Regional governments**, or a Chamber representing them. Local and regional governments are classified as CS organizations in the UN system, but need to be treated as governmental entities in their own right. To solve planetary challenges, the multilateral system needs to look at issues not from national boundaries, but planetary boundaries and include local and regional levels.
- **Hybrid modes of engagement** would provide for more inclusive civil society participation.
- A **Civil Society high level focal point** could provide a go-to person to facilitate participation. It would be procedurally simple, comparatively inexpensive, highly symbolic, and practical, further suggesting that without a visible champion in New York, “mainstreaming” can actually reduce CS participation.
- There was **wariness about ‘focal point systems’**. For it to work, there should be periodic reviews and could include CS inclusion audits, lessons from previous experience should be learned - e.g. a focal point with no money, resources, or power to move the agenda forward is not useful.
- Member States can support participation by **not joining spaces with inadequate CS representation**, ensuring the **timely issuance of visas**, and **addressing reprisals against CS actors** who participate at the UN.
- **Youth participation** in the UN needs to be systematic and go beyond ad-hoc arrangements. Youth organizations could be financed through micro- and flexible grants.
- **Identifying Member States** that either actively oppose CS participation or actively champion it would help strengthen accountability and transparency.
- Means of **distributing decision-making** across entities, spaces, and people would be a more fruitful object of CS attention, than simply securing a “seat at the table.”

- Efforts must be made to **resolve the tyranny of the minority**, where an entire system can be paralyzed by the objection of a few. The UN Security Council and veto system are obvious examples.
- **Accountability to citizens** is as important as state-focused accountability, for example, by using technology to allow people to assess progress on climate issues or peace.
- **Civil society itself** must be a strong advocate for aforementioned initiatives and improve coordination and organization.

### Reflections from Member State representatives

- Reform of the UN Security Council has to be on the agenda at all times.
- While waiting for developments at the UN, CS needs to start acting on its own. This could include establishing structures that might not be formally recognized at the outset.
- The SDG Summit next year is a good opportunity to launch new initiatives.
- The UNmute Civil Society campaign is supported by a growing percentage of UN membership and is formulating recommendations to translate its aspirations into results.
- Perceived tension between intergovernmental engagement at the UN and broader stakeholder engagement needs to be addressed.
- The aim is not to challenge government's right to negotiate and decide treaties, conventions, and resolutions, but to show that those negotiations and decisions would be enriched by the participation of civil society.
- CS must be included in informal consultations as well as formal ones.
- We need to build capacity and linkages across domain areas. We should encourage spaces where people deliberately advocate for other groupings, not only their own initiatives.
- CS participation is not a “Northern issue”. It is particularly relevant for Southern delegations that would benefit from ideas and briefings.

### Other Interventions

- The global deficit of trust in institutions reflects failures of implementation and delivery.
- We must not only rebuild trust, but foster co-responsibility. This requires a whole-of-society approach.
- Greater efficiency requires greater legitimacy. The only way to build the legitimacy of the UN and the multilateral system is to involve ‘we the peoples’.
- The future of multilateralism is multi-stakeholderism.
- The current moment is one of both great promise and colossal global dysfunction. We must take both realities into account.
- We need to move past participation to accountability.
- We should not let ourselves be limited by what is seen to be politically viable, but insist on what is necessary to avoid climate and other disasters: effective global governance.
- Capitalism without a heart is just as bad as socialism without a soul. We need to ask ourselves deep questions about how we organize society and how it should be governed.
- Institutional reform is an outcome of cultural and interpersonal understandings of how the world should work. Today we recognize our common humanity and shared destiny, but haven’t yet learned how to create governing structures that reflect that interdependence.
- Deliberative processes need to reflect the principle of subsidiarity. Meaningful conversations need to be taking place at national and local levels around the world - involving stakeholders there - not just in New York City.
- We need to interrogate our theories of change. As we do, we will find new opportunities for expanding participation.

