

# **An Open Call for Strong and Inclusive Civil Society Engagement at UN Virtual Meetings**

26 June 2020

The UN has an unprecedented opportunity to ensure continued and improved civil society access and meaningful engagement as meetings and processes are moving online to safeguard public health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If carried out inclusively and securely, **online participation presents an opportunity** to widen the number and diversity of civil society actors engaging with UN agencies, mechanisms, and bodies, including after in-person meetings are resumed, as it will remove the resource constraints linked to travel.

We are convinced that, as the Agenda 2030 states, meaningful, diverse and substantive participation of civil society in UN processes contributes to significantly **strengthen the multilateral system** and **aid the realization of the Agenda 2030** at all levels. It is worrying to see, however, that there are escalating limitations on civil society participation and on freedom of assembly and association, with the pretext of the COVID-19 crisis, at national level and attacks on multilateral cooperation and processes at the global level.

The upcoming High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2020 will be **an important moment** where the opportunity presented by virtual engagement can be utilized fully. Since its inception, civil society has worked hard to contribute to and utilize all participation possibilities at the HLPF. We, as the undersigned major groups and stakeholders, civil society organizations and coalitions (CSOs), ***call on the UN, its agencies and member states to take note of and implement the set of recommendations below to ensure the virtual nature of upcoming meetings do not hinder, but extend the inclusiveness of HLPF for meaningful civil society participation.***

Existing barriers and risks to meaningful engagement by CSOs in UN virtual meetings must be acknowledged by the UN, and a plan to address them must be developed and implemented; this plan should be guided by principles of accountability, transparency, equity, and take a rights-based approach. While we understand the technical limitations and logistical challenges that arise, **existing barriers and risks** to address include:

- Digital divide, including the digital gender divide and rural access to digital platforms

- Timings that favor the Global North, due to time zones
- Language and accessibility
- Lack of digital security, threats to human rights defenders, marginalized groups and people in vulnerable situations
- Inequality in access to information (due to language barriers, technical shortages, public availability of the information, etc.) and spread of misinformation
- Restrictions to civil society access
- Lack of information about changing modalities, timetables and opportunities
- The short turn-around times imposed on civil society for participation

**Before finalizing CSO engagement** procedures for UN virtual meetings, the UN, its agencies and member states should:

- Actively seek feedback from civil society actors, in all their diversity, when selecting secure and accessible means of communication to engage with them online or by phone
- Engage with and reach out to civil society actors in all of their diversity and scope (e.g., global to grassroots); relying on large international organizations is not sufficient as they can act as gatekeepers (whether intentionally or inadvertently)
- Perform an impact assessment on CSO participation to ensure that civil society space is not limited over time and by any changes in working methods or modalities

To **facilitate CSO engagement at UN virtual meetings**, the UN, its agencies and the member states should:

- Make available, at least two weeks prior to the meeting, comprehensive and readily understandable information in a variety of languages, at a minimum in all six UN languages, on how to engage with the UN virtually, and test the methodologies used prior to the official sessions (for example, through call testing by UNDESA with participants prior to the calls, preparatory calls for answering technical questions, etc.)
- Take measures to mitigate and respond to the possibility of new and increased risks of intimidation and reprisals targeting human rights defenders, as well as marginalized groups and groups in vulnerable situations, when operating online, and when submitting information to the related mechanisms. Engage the relevant UN human rights mechanisms in these measures as they are implemented at the HLPF and across all sustainable development processes.

- Connect with civil society actors who are less able to acquire the necessary technology and connectivity on their own to provide them with financial and technological assistance, reaching first to the groups left most behind.
- Adopt secure, open, inclusive and accessible communication platforms to protect civil society and ensure participation regardless of technological resources or accessibility needs.
- Clearly indicate how data will be stored and only share participation lists externally if participants have consented to it being shared.
- Ensure that opportunities for participation, real interaction and engagement for both ECOSOC-accredited and non-accredited NGOs should be, at a minimum, as significant and as meaningful as they were in person, with a goal to increase opportunities

**In addition**, the UN and its agencies, offices, and other constituent bodies should:

- Develop indicators to understand the impact of virtual meeting participation on the meaningful and effective participation of major groups and other stakeholders, and civil society organizations and coalitions, in consultation with those groups.
- Collect, analyze and use diverse data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts to understand participation and broader trends
- Adapt processes based on the data analysis, including towards narrowing and eliminating the digital divide
- Ensure data security and privacy
- Utilize the lessons learned from this virtual HLPF 2020 to establish best practices of sustained and inclusive virtual civil society engagement processes, throughout the year for all sustainable development processes.

In order to ensure that **HLPF 2020** can be **as participatory and as inclusive** as possible, UN, its agencies and members states should:

- Ensure that as many representatives of Major Groups and other Stakeholders as possible are given the opportunity to participate and speak at all official sessions and activities of HLPF, including the thematic sessions and the voluntary national reviews (VNRs). We recommend a minimum of five civil society speakers per session, self-selected by the MGoS mechanism, with an aim for diversity in all its forms.

- During VNR sessions, and throughout the whole HLPF 2020, inclusion of national and local civil society groups, especially from the VNR countries, should be prioritized.
- All civil society speakers should have time to read their questions during the VNR sessions. In the event the Member State presenting a VNR does not have sufficient time to answer, they will provide a written response within a month, to be posted on the HLPF website.
- Because interaction with member states will be limited, and because many of the national VNR processes were gravely affected by COVID-19 crisis, the engagement of civil society organizations at the national level were limited. Taking this into consideration, the alternative reports prepared by CSOs should be made available on the UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform.
- Virtual engagement opportunities should be utilized for a better connection between the sustainable development processes and the human rights mechanisms of the UN. These should be guided by meaningful interactions, such as discussion rooms, and should not be broadcasts or webinars where interaction is limited to chat conversations.
- Information regarding the civil society led events should be made as accessible as the member state led events (e.g. side events, trainings, information sessions)
- Member states should be encouraged to establish follow up mechanisms, even if virtually, including a follow up meeting with civil society, after their VNR at HLPF 2020, to engage them in national implementation and monitoring efforts.
- All meetings shall be inclusive by providing for accessibility needs, such as international sign language translations and closed captioning.

We voice our concern over escalating limitations on civil society participation, freedom of assembly and expression in certain national contexts, and the attacks on the multilateral institutions and processes, under the pretext of the COVID-19 crisis. In the wake of such a time, and taking into consideration the impact of the pandemic on national VNR consultation processes, and regional sustainable development fora, the UN and member states must provide a **platform for strong civil society engagement during the HLPF2020**.

We, as the undersigned civil society organizations, coalitions and major groups and other stakeholders are ready to collaborate and cooperate for increased inclusivity and meaningful participation, and in the implementation of SDGs, especially at this challenging time for all. We call on the UN, its agencies and the member states to take these relevant measures to ensure this participation. We must not miss this opportunity to meet the call to leave no one behind!

## **Organization, Country/Region**

28 Too Many, United Kingdom

ABAAD-Resource Center for Gender Equality, Lebanon

ActionAid International, South Africa

Action for Sustainable Development, United Kingdom

Africa 2063 Association, Cameroon

African-Asian Rural Development Organization (AARDO-NIGERIA), Nigeria

African Centre for Human Rights Education (CAEDHU), Senegal

African Coalition on Green Growth, Uganda

African Youth Commission, The Gambia

Africa Young Positives Network (AY), Uganda

Afrihealth Optonet Association, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya

Aid Organization, Bangladesh

Airwars, United Kingdom

ALTSEAN-Burma, Malaysia

American Pakistan Foundation, United States of America

Angel Support Foundation, Nigeria

Arab Women Network for Parity and Solidarity, Egypt

ARC International, Global

Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Malaysia

Asia Pacific Alliance for SRHR, Thailand (Regional)

Asia Pacific Women's Watch (APWW), Asia Pacific Regional

Asociación Ciudadana ACCEDER, Costa Rica

Asociación Ciudadana por los Derechos Humanos, Argentina

Asociación de Mujeres Indígenas Kunas, Panama

Asociación Red de Jóvenes para la Incidencia Política (INCIDEJOVEN), Guatemala

Association des Femmes de l'Europe Méridionale (AFEM), France

Association for Progressive Communications, South Africa

Association for Promotion Sustainable Development, India

Association for Single Mothers (ASMOK), Kenya

Association Montessori Internationale, France

Association Nationale AL HIDN, Morocco

Association Nationale des Partenaires Migrants, Sénégal

ASTRA Network, Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Aube Nouvelle pour la Femme et le Développement (ANFD), Democratic Republic of Congo

Autistic Minority International, Switzerland

Balance Promoción para el Desarrollo y Juventud, Mexico

Bangladesh Indigenous Women's Network, Bangladesh

Barnabas Charity Outreach, Nigeria

BirdLife International, UK

BPW BRASIL, Brasil

Bright Women, Portugal

British Association of Women Entrepreneurs (BAWE), United Kingdom

Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, USA

Cameroon Education For All Network, Cameroon

Carbone Guinée, Guinea

Caribbean Male Action Network (CariMAN), Caribbean Region

Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR), United States of America

Center Women and Modern World, Azerbaijan

Centre for Democracy and Democracy, Nigeria

Centro de Derechos de Mujeres, Honduras

Centro de Estudios e Investigación sobre Mujeres, Spain

Centro de Investigaciones para la Equidad Política Pública y Desarrollo (CIPE), Mexico

CERPAC, Republic of Congo

Champion Youth, Liberia

CHIRAPAQ, Center of Indigenous Cultures of Perú, Peru

CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, Netherlands

Christian Aid, Ireland

Christian Aid, United Kingdom

Civil Society Advance Forum on Sustainable Development (CAS2030), Nigeria

Civil Society Coalition on Education for All, Nigeria

Civil Society Financing for Development (FfD) Group, Global

Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS), The Netherlands

COC Nederland, The Netherlands

Colectivo "Genero y Teologia para el Desarrollo", Bolivia

Colectivo Mujeres Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

Collectif Sénégalais des Africaines pour la Promotion de l'Education Relative à l'Environnement (COSAPER), Senegal

Combined Social Network, Bangladesh

Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres, (CLADEM), Latin America and Caribbean Region

Community Action on Sustainable Development Initiative, Nigeria

Community Initiatives for Development in Pakistan, Pakistan

Community Science Centre - Vadodara, India

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, México

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, United States of America

Consortium Humanitarian Agency , Sri Lanka

Consortium Of Women Entrepreneurs Of India, India  
Consultancy on Human Rights & Gender Issues, Germany  
CoopeSoliDar R.L, Costa Rica  
Coordinadora 28 de Mayo, Guatemala  
Coordinadora de la Mujer, Bolivia  
Counselling Line for Women and Girls, Albania  
Creación Positiva, Spain  
D.C. Unit Church Women United, United States of America  
DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project), Uganda  
Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, Fiji  
DoNation, India  
Dr Uzo Adirieje Foundation (DUZAFFOUND), Nigeria  
Dukingire Isi Yacu, Burundi  
Echoes of Women in Africa Initiatives, Nigeria  
Egyptian Feminist Union, Egypt  
Eidos Global, Uruguay  
Elige Red de Jovenes por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos, Mexico  
Elimu Kwanza Initiative, Kenya  
Emmaus International, Zimbabwe  
EMPOWER INDIA, India  
Environmental Protection Promoters Initiative (EPPI), Nigeria  
Equal Asia Foundation, Thailand  
Equality Bahamas, The Bahamas  
Equal Measures 2030, Kenya  
Equidad de Género: Ciudadanía, Trabajo y Familia, Mexico  
European Network of People of African Descent (ENPAD) , Sweden



Faith to Action Network, Kenya

Family Education Services Foundation, United States of America

Family Organization for Empowerment (FOREM), Kenya

Family Planning NSW, Australia

FAWCO, Austria

Federación de Mujeres Municipalistas de América Latina y el Caribe (FEMUM ALC),  
Peru

Federación Planificación Familiar Estatal, Spain

Federation of Environmental and Ecological Diversity for Agricultural Revampment and  
Human Rights (FEEDAR & HR), Cameroon

FEEdar & HR MCUCOOP with BOD, Cameroon

FEMNET, Kenya

Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Fiji

Focus on Women Magazine, United States of America

FOKUS - Forum for Women and Development, Norway

Fondation EBOKO, France / Congo

Fondo Semillas, Mexico

Foro Ciudadano de Participación por la Justicia y los Derechos Humanos (FOCO) -  
Instituto de Participación y Desarrollo (INPADE), Argentina

Foundation for Building Sustainable Communities, Canada

Fundació Aroa (Aroa Foundation), Spain

Fundación Arcoiris por el Respeto a la Diversidad Sexual, Mexico

Fundación Colectivo Hombres XX, Mexico

Fundación Global, Argentina

Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer (FEIM), Argentina

Fundación PLURALES, Argentina

Fundación SIDOM, Argentina

Fundación Unidas: Mujeres Construyendo Tejido Social, Colombia  
Fund of Women Entrepreneurs, Georgia  
FUSA AC, Argentina  
G.R.A.C.E Foundation, Zimbabwe  
Gabidezin House Of Fashion-Boadi, Ghana  
Gatef organization, Egypt  
Gemstone Tech Tutors, Nigeria  
Gender-Centre, Republic of Moldova  
Gestos– HIV, Communication and Gender, Brazil  
Ghalayini for Trade & Turnkey, Lebanon  
Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, Thailand  
Global Ecovillage Network, United States of America  
Global Goals Institute, New Zealand  
Global Network of CSOs for Disaster Reduction, Global  
Global Socio-economic and Financial Evolution Network (GSFEN), Nigeria  
Global Youth Organisation, India  
Greenation for Environmental Development, Egypt  
Green Hope Foundation, Canada  
Greenspring Development Initiative, Nigeria  
Grob, United States of America  
GROOTS T&T, Trinidad & Tobago  
HaritaDhara Research Development and Education Foundation, India  
Hawaii Institute for Human Rights, United States of America  
Healthier Hearts Foundation, India  
Herstoire Collective, Saint Lucia  
Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA), Pakistan

IFFI Samar, Mexico

Inclusive Climate Change Adaptation for a Sustainable Africa, Kenya

Indigenous Information Network, Kenya

Institute of Gender, Law and Development (INSGENAR), Argentina

Instituto Chi Pixab, Guatemala

International Alliance of Women, Greece

International Communication Center, Nigeria

International Council for Adult Education, Serbia

International Council of Women, Switzerland

International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), France

International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) World,  
Global

International Movement ATD Fourth World, United States of America

International Organization of Women, Switzerland

International Partnership and Development Organization, Russia

International Planned Parenthood Federation, United Kingdom

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Brussels

International Women's Anthropology Conference (IWAC), United States of America

International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), Australia

International Women's Forum, Turkey

International Women's Health Coalition, United States of America

International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP Asia Pacific),  
Malaysia

International Youth Alliance, Bulgaria

Ipas, United States of America

Ipas Centroamérica y México (Ipas CAM), México, Costa Rica, El Salvador,  
Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panamá

ISHR, United States of America

Itaka Initiative, Nigeria

Gender Justice Consultancy, The Netherlands

Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP),  
Japan

Jolen Press, United States of America

Journalists for Human Rights, North Macedonia

Just Associates, South Africa

Just Associates (JASS), Global

Justice Call Foundation, Egypt

Kevoy Community Development Institute (KCDI), Jamaica

KINDERENERGY, United States of America

Korean Disability Forum, Republic of Korea

Kothowain, Bangladesh

Kulmiye Aid Foundation, Somalia

L'Associacio de Drets Sexuals i Reprductius, Spain

LandSea Maldives, Maldives

Lanka Fundamental Rights Organization, Sri Lanka

Latin America and Caribbean Women's Health Network (LACWHN), Latin America and  
Caribbean Region

Let There Be Light International, United States of America

LGBT Centre, Mongolia

LOTS Charity Foundation, Nigeria

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights, Egypt

MadreEmprendedora, Argentina

Make Mothers Matter, International

Mama Cash, The Netherlands

Mandy Sanghera Foundation, United Kingdom  
Marie Stopes International, United Kingdom  
Medical IMPACT, Mexico  
Medical Students Association of India, India  
MENA Rights Group, Switzerland  
MenEngage Alliance, United States of America  
Mind Reformers Network, Nigeria  
Mitini Nepal, Nepal  
Moravian College, United States of America  
Morya Samajik Pratishthan, India  
MPact Global Action for Gay Men's Health & Rights, United States of America  
Mujeres Guerrerenses por la Democracia, Mexico  
Mujer y Salud en Uruguay (MYSU), Uruguay  
MURNA Foundation, Nigeria  
MY World Mexico, Mexico  
Nafas LGBT Azerbaijan Alliance, Azerbaijan  
National Campaign for Sustainable Development Nepal, Nepal  
National Youth Council of The Gambia, The Gambia  
NawaEnergy, Indonesia  
Network of Rural Women Producers - Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad & Tobago  
NetWwater, Sri Lanka  
NGO Major Group, Global  
NGO Parastor, Tajikistan  
Nigerian Youth Climate Network, Nigeria  
Noble Missions for Change Initiative, Nigeria  
North Star NGO, Jordan

NQBSS Livestock Breeders, Zimbabwe  
Observatorio de Género y Equidad, Chile  
ONG PADJENA, Benin  
Orchid Project, United Kingdom  
Organización de Mujeres Tierra Viva, Guatemala  
Osi Joe Touching Lives Initiative, Nigeria  
OutRight Action International, United States of America  
PA Women's Organization Alga, Kyrgyzstan  
Peace Actor Network, Nigeria  
Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement, Philippines  
Plan International, Global  
Plataforma Derechos Aquí y Ahora Honduras, Honduras  
PODER, Mexico  
Poverty Reduction Forum Trust, Zimbabwe  
Presentation Sisters Ireland & UK, Ireland  
Projonma Academy, Bangladesh  
Psychology of Science in Policy, United States of America  
Raks Thai Foundation, Thailand  
Red Agenda 2030 MX, México  
Red de defensoras del ambiente y el Buen Vivir, Argentina  
Red de Educación Popular entre Mujeres (REPEM -LAC), Bolivia  
Red Dot Foundation, India  
Red Dot Foundation Global, United States of America  
Red Juvenil de AMUGEN, Guatemala  
Red Nacional Jóvenes de Ambiente, Colombia

Red por los Derechos Humanos de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes (REDHNNA),  
Venezuela

Regional Center for International Development Corporation (RCIDC), Uganda

Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, United States of America / International  
RESURJ, Brazil

Rural Area Development Program (RADP), Nepal

Rutgers, The Netherlands

Saathi Sanga Manka Kura, Nepal

Saferworld, United Kingdom

Sahara Welfare Foundation, Pakistan

Sanctus Initiative for Human Development and Values Sustainability (SIHDEVAS),  
Nigeria

Sangram Sanstha, India

Santé et Action Globale, Togo

Sarthak Educational Trust, India

Save the Children International, United States of America

SDGs National Network Nepal, Nepal

Services for Rural Development and Agriculture (SEDRTA), Chile

See Other Sides Consulting, United States of America

Sex og Politikk / IPPF Norway, Norway

Shareteah Humanitarian Organization – SHO, Iraq

Shevolution, United Kingdom

Shirley Ann Sullivan Educational Foundation, United States of America

Shishu Aangina, Bangladesh

Sistren Theatre Collective, Jamaica

Social Economic and Governance Promotion Centre, Tanzania

Social Watch / Contrôle Citoyen au Bénin, Bénin

Society for Conservation and Sustainability of Energy and Environment in Nigeria (SOCSEEN), Nigeria

Society for the Improvement of Rural People (SIRP), Nigeria

Sombrilla Centroamericana, Central America Region

Sonke Gender Justice, South Africa

Soroptimist International, Canada

Soroptimist International, United Kingdom

Soroptimist International, United States of America

Southern Africa Climate Change Coalition, Botswana

Special Talent Exchange Program, Pakistan

SRJC, South Africa

SRS Livestock Development Foundation, Zimbabwe

Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities, Global

Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA Network), Uganda

Student of international relations and conflict resolution, Chad

Sukaar Welfare Organization, Pakistan

Suma Veritas Foundation, Argentina

Support on AIDS & Life Thru Telephone Helpline (SALT), Uganda

Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF), Thailand

Tamazight Women's Movement, Libya

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Pacific, Fiji

The Great Green Kouno Dagal Wall (GGKDW), Chad

The Heritage Institute of Policy Studies (HIPS), Somalia

The Millennials Movement, Peru

The Missing MDG initiative, United States of America

The Regla Project, Philippines



Together 2030, Global  
Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development, Uganda  
Unchained at Last, United States of America  
United States Sustainable Development Corp, United States of America  
Univers des Jeunes, United States of America  
UN Major Group for Children and Youth, Global  
Urgent Action Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean, Latin America Region  
Vecinas Feministas, Argentina  
Virtuous Woman International, El Salvador  
VIVAT International, United States of America  
Voces de Mujeres Afrodescendientes en Panamá, Panama  
Voice of The Vulnerables, Nigeria  
WACUNA-UK, United Kingdom  
Water Justice & Gender, The Netherlands  
WILDAF-AO, Togo  
Womankind Worldwide, United Kingdom  
Woman In Media - Newark, United States of America  
Women's Coalition - Turkey, Turkey  
Women's Consortium of Ukraine, Ukraine  
Women's Earth and Climate Action Network, United States of America  
Women's Environment & Development Organization, United States of America  
Women's Human Rights Education Institute, Costa Rica/Canada  
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Global  
Women's Rehabilitation Center (WOREC), Nepal  
Women's Studies Research Centre - The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong  
Women's Support and Information Centre NPO, Estonia

Women's World Summit Foundation, Switzerland

Women Against Rape, Antigua & Barbuda

Women and Girls of African Descent Caucus, Americas and the Caribbean, United States of America

Women Educators Association of Nigeria, Nigeria

Women Engage for A Common Future (WECF), The Netherlands

Women Entrepreneurs Association Turkey (KAGIDER), Turkey

Women for Fair Development, Malawi

Women for Peace and Ecology, Germany

Women for Water Partnership (WfWP), The Netherlands

Women for Women's Human Rights - New Ways, Turkey

Women Rights and Sustainable Society, Nigeria

Women Solidarity Namibia (WSN), Namibia

World Animal Net, United States of America

World Benchmarking Alliance, The Netherlands

World Distribution Federation (International Economic Organization), Republic of Korea

World Institute on Disability, United States of America

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Global

Young Changemakers Foundation, Nigeria

Young Shapers, Pakistan

Youth Advocacy Network (YAN), Pakistan

Youth Advocates Ghana-YAG, Ghana

Youth Approaches to Health Association(Y-PEER Turkey), Turkey

Youth Christian Lawyers, Pakistan

Youth For Environment Education And Development Foundation (YFEED Foundation), Nepal

YUWA, Nepal

Zimbabwe Climate Change Coalition, Zimbabwe