

UNFPA Input

Enhanced and Strategic CSO Engagement at the UN

This paper is an input to the OHCHR on a “Civil Society Space” and looks at innovative ways of engaging CSOs in regional and global processes related to the ICPD and the 2030 Agenda.

Background:

Over the past 10 years, UNFPA has actively engaged Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), including youth networks and Faith-Based Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), in its global advocacy of the ICPD agenda in multilateral deliberations. This engagement has taken several forms, briefly described below.

In 2010, a “Global NGO Advisory Panel” for the Executive Director was established. Its objective was to strengthen partnerships between UNFPA and NGOs to advance global goals. The Advisory Panel was to provide its views on UNFPA’s advocacy strategies, on the approach to specific initiatives that relate to the ICPD Agenda, on new development trends, on opportunities and challenges in the external environment and recommend possible areas for action.

Furthermore, CSOs and youth networks were instrumental and meaningfully engaged in the ICPD Beyond 2014 review process. UNFPA directly involved them through CSO consultations that began with a global meeting in Istanbul in 2011, and continued in various CSO regional meetings in 2012 (Accra, Jamaica, Istanbul, Kuala Lumpur and Montevideo). In addition, youth and CSO pre-meetings were held before all the regional economic commissions’ conferences in 2013. In addition, CSOs actively participated in the ICPD thematic review conferences, the Commission on Population and Development sessions, and the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the ICPD Beyond 2014. These engagements contributed significantly to the successful outcomes of the ICPD review. In addition, it resulted in the creation or strengthening of various regional CSO networks and the Youth Leadership Working Group (YLWG) for ICPD.

The YLWG is a group youth networks representing various constituencies from the global and all regional levels. They emerged from the Bali Global Youth Forum (GYF) Steering Committee members. After the Bali GYF, during 2013-2016 the YLWG has worked to advocate for youth issues, particularly as they are reflected in the Bali Declaration, in the various ICPD review meetings. Attributes of the YLWG is that they represent thematic and geographical diversity, they are youth-led, they are familiar with the UN (UNFPA in particular) and they are already organized.

Since 2013, Faith-Based NGOs have been systematically convened around SRHR advocacy as part of initiatives UNFPA designed to build and consolidate interfaith

support for the ICPD and the SDG processes. UNFPA similarly engages with CSOs around sustainable development, health, humanitarian and human rights issues reinforcing synergies, building on pre-existing and creating new platforms and expanding the CSOs space. The engagement of CSOs in the Universal Peer Review mechanisms – inviting them to speak and share expertise in the events on the implementation of the recommendations – has been useful as it highlights their contribution to the monitoring and accountability processes.

Finally, CSOs and youth networks are consistently engaged in advocacy and policy dialogue at the country level around ICPD issues, at relevant intergovernmental negotiations, in PGA and other high level debates and events and any pre-CSO consultations to these, and at interactive hearings with CSOs.

Enhanced engagement:

Diverse partnerships, such as the ones built during the ICPD review, should be fostered, strengthened and transformed as the world moves towards the implementation and monitoring of Agenda 2030, to similarly advance the ICPD Agenda.

However, in the inter-governmental space, there are concerns regarding representation of the civil society. The challenge stems from existing mechanisms which have been very restrictive in allowing more space to engage CSO. Additionally, the range of issues that CSO's can engage in is also limited. The current mechanisms for major intergovernmental processes is engages the Major Groups mainly. The Major Groups, established in 1992 are not diverse enough to adequately represent the breadth of the organizations and themes.. There is need to engage stakeholders that respond to the breadth of these agendas, which go beyond the environment. ECOSOC accreditation remains a valuable vehicle for CSO engagement. However, it is extremely cumbersome and there is a trend to not support certain ICPD-focused CSOs. Therefore, in its current format, ECOSOC accreditation process can be limiting in terms of ensuring the broadest representation and engagement on thematic issues.

It is recommended that the UN system should expand its engagement with a greater diversity of organizations, which fully adhere to the human rights agenda, including by expanding its capacity to reach out to civil society. In intergovernmental policy platforms and discussions, expanding and modernizing participation should be an explicit objective of the UN agencies acting as leads on those intergovernmental processes. In addition, at the regional level, the UN System is leading Regional Sustainable Development Forums (RSDF), all of which foresee engaging CSOs and would benefit from an enhanced mechanism. Building open and inclusive mechanisms at the regional level will provide the examples for more open engagement at the global level. As a more open and enhanced process is established, the United Nations principles must be absolutely upheld and respected by any civil society organization which would be engaged.