CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTIONS TO REALIZING THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

DECEMBER 2015

An important milestone towards a more sustainable future, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development marks the beginning of a 15-year process of transformative change for people and planet. CONCORD - the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development whose 28 national associations, 20 international networks and 3 associate members represent 2,600 NGOs across Europe - would therefore like to emphasize the important part civil society has played and will continue to play in making this vision of human rights and well-being for all within planetary boundaries a reality.

As stated in the 2012 Commission Communication, ‘an empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system and an asset in itself’, contributing ‘to more effective policies, equitable and sustainable development and inclusive growth’ and participatory democracy by ‘representing and fostering pluralism’ and ‘articulating citizens’ concerns and growing demand for transparent and accountable governance’. CSOs’ participation in policy processes is key to ensuring inclusive and effective policies, and ‘synergies between states and CSOs can help overcome challenges of poverty, widening inequalities, social exclusion and unsustainable development’. Although the role of civil society in the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda seems to be widely recognized by the international community, in the last few years 96 countries took measures to repress citizens and restrict space for CSOs (CIVICUS, 2015). It is therefore important that the EU and its Member States, as well CSOs, involve and support civil society across the globe, in a structured manner at every step in the implementation process, so as to empower people, create ownership and ensure accountability.

OUR ROLE AS ANALYSTS AND ADVOCATES ON STRATEGIES, POLICIES, BUDGETS AND PROGRAMMES

CSOs have been contributing ideas and recommendations to the development of the 2030 Agenda for the last four years and we believe our contributions helped to make a strong framework for future sustainable development. On the basis of strong rights-, value- and evidence-based analysis of EU and Member State strategies, policies and practices, information gathered from the ground, regular contacts with other stakeholders including academia, CSOs will continue to reflect and put forward innovative and ambitious proposals for an overarching strategy to implement the 2030 Agenda at local, subnational, national and regional levels. The 2030 Agenda offers civil society – like government - the possibility of breaking out of ‘siloes’ and of cooperating much more cross-sectorally, looking more closely at the positive and negative impacts of policy measures in one area on another, i.e. policy coherence for sustainable development. CSOs will also work together to prepare recommendations for policies and legislation which should be revised or developed in order to reflect the ambition of the 2030 Agenda.

As strategies and policies can only be implemented with proper financial support, CSOs will also closely follow the budget negotiations and push for the alignment of the EU and Member States’ budget with the 2030 Agenda. Working together with actors on the ground and partnering with governments to implement projects, CSOs will engage with the EU institutions and Member States to make sure their instruments and programmes are designed in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda and delivered through the most appropriate aid delivery mechanisms and CSO funding modalities. Over the next 15 years, CSOs will hold governments to account for the promises they have made. CSOs will monitor the implementation of Agenda 2030 on the basis of official and alternative data sources such as citizens gathered data, analysing the results, preparing stakeholder reports and submitting these as inputs into the official national, regional and global follow-up and review processes.

However, since true accountability goes beyond monitoring and reporting, CSOs will push for legitimate and adequate systems of responsibility, accountability and transparency for all duty-bearers, including all actors taking on responsibilities for implementation, such as the private sector.2

In order to support these roles, CONCORD invites the EU and Member States to:

➢ inform and involve CSOs at every stage of the process of designing implementation strategies and governance and accountability mechanisms, reviewing and negotiating budgets, drafting new or revising existing policies, legislative acts, instruments and programmes, and choosing the most appropriate aid delivery mechanisms and CSO funding modalities;

➢ ensure that the monitoring, accountability and review mechanisms at local, national, EU and global level envisage a central role for civil society and the public;

➢ create spaces for civil society and other stakeholders to engage in a political dialogue, both within the EU and in its political dialogue with other regions (such as through the EU-ACP Partnership or the joint Africa-EU Strategy) and countries;

➢ support the progress of partner countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda by engaging in regular dialogue with CSOs in third countries to assess the impact of EU and Member State policies in those countries, address incoherencies and support civil society efforts on the ground.3 The EU roadmaps for engagement with CSOs could play an important role in this regard.

OUR ROLE AS IMPLEMENTERS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDERS

Through their programmes and projects and their core business, CSOs play multiple roles in the goal and target areas of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable. This work often complements the work undertaken by other actors such as local and national government representatives, international organisations and private sector actors. CSOs can often identify where efforts should be prioritised and reach out to people who are most excluded or difficult to reach. CSOs are proactive in providing practical solutions to local and global challenges and pilot important innovative projects that can be scaled up afterwards.

CSOs often build or contribute to multi-stakeholder partnerships to implement certain programmes or projects jointly. Or they may play a convening role in bringing different actors to the table to explore solutions and bridge cross-sectoral gaps. All efforts will need to be coordinated and planned to ensure we all pull in the same direction. To ensure that we all pull in the same direction, efforts will need to be coordinated, but always in a way which respects the diversity and right of initiative of people and civil society.

CSOs have an important role to play in building capacity of and providing tools and information channels for civil society at the community level to allow them to learn more about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and be able to engage in the process in their various roles.

In order to support these roles, CONCORD invites the EU and its Member States to:

➢ support cross-sectoral partnership-building between CSOs and other actors working on different but interlinked themes and at different levels from the local to the national and international, while recognising the different but complementary roles and identities of stakeholders and ensuring people’s participation;

➢ ensure national, regional and thematic programmes support CSOs’ contribution to the Agenda 2030, through adequate and predictable funding, while respecting their right of initiative and fostering a broad and diverse civil society working in the spirit of the new Agenda.

OUR ROLE AS AWARENESS RAISERS AND CITIZEN ENGAGERS

CSOs will play an important role in engaging the public in the 2030 Agenda through education and awareness-raising for global citizenship. Given the scope of this Agenda, people will be a key engine for change: as consumers, community leaders, voters, advocates, campaigners, demonstrators, greenhouse gas emitters and waste producers, environmentalists, workers, employers, travellers, educators, lifelong learners, etc.

Through education and awareness-raising for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, peace and cultural diversity, CSOs contribute to building public engagement with global justice issues and empower them to act towards sustainable development.

In order to support these roles, CONCORD invites the EU and its Member States to:

➢ develop and implement together with all stakeholders including other relevant DGs or ministries an education and awareness-raising for global citizenship strategy (Global Citizenship Consensus).

At the same time, CSOs will continue their efforts in enhancing their own development effectiveness in line with the Istanbul Principles, approved in 2010. However, this also requires an enabling environment for CSOs to play their part, where civil and political rights are respected such as granting free and full access to information and adequate financial resources, freedom of expression, assembly and association and freedom of the media. Both commitments on Istanbul principles and an enabling environment for civil society are part of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation.

CONCORD looks forward to engaging with the EU, its Member States and other stakeholders to contribute to achieving all people’s human rights and well-being for all within planetary boundaries.