

# 2018 ECOSOC Special Meeting on “Towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all”

## Prague Preparatory Meeting

26-27 March 2018 – Prague, Czech Republic

### INFORMAL SUMMARY OF THE PRESIDENT

The Preparatory Meeting of the 2018 ECOSOC Special Meeting on the theme “Towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation”, was convened by the President of ECOSOC, HE Ms. Marie Chatardová, and hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. It was organized in collaboration with the government of Colombia, represented by HE Mr. Luis Fernando Mejia, Minister of National Planning of Colombia. The Meeting was attended by the President of the UN General Assembly, HE Mr. Miroslav Lajčák and UN Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed and other senior UN staff as well as Permanent Representatives and experts from Member States. High-level representatives of the Government of the Czech Republic included the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, HE Mr. Andrej Babis, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, HE Mr. Martin Stropnický.

The second day of the meeting, March 27, consisted of a field trip to the city of Kolín, Czech Republic, which featured presentations of participatory approaches in municipal governance.

#### **Key Highlights**

- Participation of all in sustainable development is not an option, but a necessary precondition for the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Beyond fostering sustainable development, equal participation in political and public affairs is also a right which must be respected and preserved. Engaging youths, women and other groups is a necessity.
- Promoting participation and inclusion must be bolstered by substantive, long-term and systematic measures, including laws, policies, institutional capacity and data. Stakeholders require dedicated platforms for their inputs.
- The 2030 Agenda represents a universal framework to foster sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies. It will be critical to identify, replicate and scale up initiatives and strategies that work to promote development in all communities.
- Strengthening partnerships and awareness of the SDGs will require improving outreach, investment and enhanced cooperation among all stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector.
- Policies must be formulated and translated from local to national and global levels of action. Local governments have a crucial role to support Agenda implementation by responding to local needs, with policies and plans that match local contexts and realities.

- Each stakeholder group's value-added to sustainable development must be maximized to create the necessary momentum to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Civil society organizations are amplifiers of the 2030 Agenda at all levels; they give a voice to those left behind.

### **Opening session**

The Prague Preparatory Meeting for the 2018 ECOSOC Special Meeting “Towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all” was the first time the United Nations Economic and Social Council meets in the Czech Republic. High-level speakers at the opening session highlighted the timely moment to advance discussions on participation and collective action in an increasingly complex environment for multilateralism. It was noted that current trends, such as armed conflicts, political oppression, rising inequalities and climate change are stifling global efforts to advance development and risk undermining global commitments to sustainable development. Given the global nature of such challenges, a retreat from multilateralism is not conducive to solving these complex issues. Instead, further concerted multilateral solutions are needed to address the roadblocks to a better future for people and planet.

Speakers emphasized that the 2030 Agenda offers a sound roadmap to a future with peace and economic and social progress for all. The SDGs require a strong financing framework to foster universal implementation. It is critical that the 2030 Agenda is implemented at all levels – the global, national and local level. To foster implementation at the local level, there is the need for territorial focused development plans that build on societal consensus and foster the inclusion of all involved groups.

### ***National approaches to advance the SDGs and participation of all***

To achieve sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all, strong and accountable institutions based on the rule of law are a necessary precondition. This requires trust into institutional systems, which needs to be further strengthened and rebuild, as necessary. The experience of the Czech Republic following the “Velvet Revolution” highlights avenues to rebuild trust in institutions. This included fostering participation in public affairs and providing platforms for civic discussions, thus actively engaging citizens in changing their communities. As these approaches have positively affected development in the Czech Republic, such principles also lie at the core of Czech development assistance, which amounted to 216 million USD in 2016.

Columbia's reconciliation process, following decades of civil war, provides another example of how trust and inclusion can be rebuilt for the benefit of society at large. The country has experienced a strong economic recovery, with income projected to double every 15 years thanks to an additional 1 per cent in economic growth due to peace, following the successful conclusion of peace talks. Economic growth has gone hand in hand with improvements of a variety of development indicators, including a decrease in the poverty rate from 40 to 26 percent, and of extreme poverty from 14 to 7 per cent, lifting 2.8 million individuals out of poverty. Nonetheless, critical challenges remain, including climate change, which threatens prosperity across the globe. To address these and other challenges related to sustainable

development, Columbia was the first country to introduce the SDGs into the national development plan. The country has also produced an SDG white paper, with 16 targets that highlight national priorities on each Sustainable Development Goal.

## **High-level Panel – Achieving the 2030 Agenda through Participation of All**

### *Advancing implementation of the 2030 Agenda*

The 2030 Agenda reflects the needs of the growing population across the world and represents a response to global challenges that cannot be met by each country acting on its own. It is a shared vision of people for their shared future. It was recalled that the Agenda was formulated through an inclusive process, with all stakeholders seen as critical contributors to its implementation. The Agenda acts as important vehicle to mobilize stakeholders for sustainable development and its successful implementation will require a push to leverage financial resources, with an additional 5-7 trillion USD needed for universal implementation. Strengthened partnerships with the private sector could contribute to unlocking the necessary resources for sustainable development in areas such as data, technology and infrastructure investment.

Speakers emphasized that young people can act as vanguards for the implementation of the Agenda by creating the necessary momentum to push for change in society. Panelists noted that Youths represent the present rather than the future. To engage youth, it is critical to strengthen communication of the 2030 Agenda and change the narrative around young people: They are “us” not “them”. Introducing the Agenda into educational curricula is one way of creating awareness of the SDGs. Moreover, it is critical to redouble efforts to provide access to education for all, as there are many young people without access to a basic education.

Participation of all stakeholders in the development process is particularly important at the local and municipal level. Studies have shown that 65 percent of targets cannot be reached without local government. The 2030 Agenda encourages universal participation as it brings people from all parts of society to act on a joint vision for a better future. Challenges to participation of all include social norms that may hinder participation of some groups, as well as the “concrete” ceiling that young people continue to face in making their voices heard. Low political and civic literacy and a lack of political engagement also act as impediments for societal involvement.

### *The role of the United Nations and ECOSOC*

At the national level, many countries have integrated the SDGs into national development plans. 65 Member States have already presented their national strategies as part of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), held under the auspices of ECOSOC. Other platforms of ECOSOC have also contributed to fostering momentum for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including the ECOSOC Youth Forum as well as the Partnership Forum, which promotes multidimensional partnerships, including with the private sector. Three Special Meetings of the President of the General Assembly also address matters relating to Agenda implementation, including an event launching the international decade of water and an event dedicated to youth engagement.

ECOSOC can act as the “mothership” for sustainable development. The Council represents a platform for Member States to share achievements and challenges in the alignment of national policies with the 2030 Agenda and engage in open discussions on development approaches. ECOSOC also acts as a link to a diverse family of UN entities and plays an important coordinating role, being responsible for around 70% of UN funds.

Presenter noted that United Nations reform can effectively support Member States through strengthening the organization’s work on peace and security, management reform and the reform of the UN development system.

### **Best Practices**

The best practices sessions provided the opportunity for speakers to introduce national and local initiatives to advance participatory approaches to governance.

#### *Estonia*

Involvement of civil society in policy making has improved significantly in Estonia thanks to the implementation of participatory approaches. Three major steps have supported this trend: 1) Involving people in the law-making process; 2) Introducing a collective citizens’ initiative portal; and 3) Implementing participatory budgeting.

An e-consultation system for Estonian citizens opens the inter-ministerial platform for coordination of documentation to the wider public. This has allowed civil society to participate by providing comments and inputs to proposed legislation and policy documents. The city of Tartu has been one of the pioneers in the implementation of participatory budgeting approaches. The initiative has boosted cooperation among stakeholders in municipal governance and has advanced local solutions to local challenges.

#### *Canada*

The revitalization of Regent Park, one of Canada's oldest social housing communities, provides an example of how SDG11 can be advanced through participation of all. A cornerstone of the revitalization was the housing authorities’ community participation strategy. The engagement process has been owned by the community and embraced at the corporate level with the overall aim of enhancing the resilience and inclusivity of residents in Regent Park. Key requirements for the success of the project have been the introduction of participatory budgeting through a social fund, which allows residents to improve their own communities. The project has shown that it is possible to achieve economic and social goals at the same time. It also underlined that, by relinquishing more control to all stakeholders involved, better overall results can be achieved.

#### *Tunisia*

The “Women speak out” campaign in Tunisia has enabled women, particularly from under-served neighborhoods, to make their voices heard on health care and other social issues. The initiative has provided platforms for knowledge sharing and capacity building for women to demand health care, including sexual and reproductive rights. The project has been a catalyst for a societal dialogue on health and an accountability mechanism for health delivery in

communities. The results have included increased resilience and attitude transformation with new skills for self-protection and entrepreneurship.

Tunisia's CSO shadow report for UNHCR's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) has underlined the willingness of Government to include CSO issues in its human rights report. Through alliance building and close engagement with the ministry in charge of human rights, there has been a strong advocacy platform in Tunisia to advance women's fundamental rights, including by contributing to legislative changes in the area of violence against women.

### *Australia*

Local governments in Australia have been applying innovative participatory approaches to work with communities to understand and address complex social challenges. The Innovation Academy encourages public participation and cross-sector collaboration in the design and delivery of public services, policies and programmes. Participants from the public, private and community sector are taught innovation methods, including on human-centered design, data-driven decision making, problem definition and ideation. The "Change camp" initiative has introduced platforms to seek common solutions to societal challenges and foster grassroots social change and active citizenship.

### *Zambia*

The „My School, My Vote” project has introduced participatory budgeting models in schools in Zambia. Participatory budgeting is a process of democratic deliberation and decision-making, which allows citizens to identify, discuss, and prioritize public spending projects, giving them the power to make real decisions about how money is spent in their communities. Participatory budgeting in schools can be beneficial for children as it enables them to propose projects and to experience actual democratic debates, campaigning and voting. Overall, participatory budgeting initiatives can foster progress on SDG 16 and particularly Target 16.7.

### *India*

The Foundation for Community Consensus has pioneered participatory budgeting in schools in India. The initiative has shown that school participatory budgeting is an effective way to engage students by empowering them to express their choices and imbibe critical skills. The exercise comprises various phases in which stakeholders interact and ideate with the sole purpose of reaching broad consensus. The project showed that young people are making needs-based assessments, underlining the importance of engaging youth in decision-making processes. It is critical to overcome skepticism of participatory approaches to leverage their effect in communities and foster the scaling-up and replication in various contexts.

### *Czech Republic*

The experience of the Czech Republic in rebuilding trust following the “Velvet Revolution” has highlighted the importance of fostering participation of citizens in governance. Similarly, in advancing sustainable development, it is critical to involve people in drafting strategies for 2030 Agenda implementation. To achieve positive results, there is the need to overcome a lack of trust between groups of stakeholders, including between private sector and civil society.

Two concrete examples of inclusive initiatives of the Czech Government to advance the 2030 Agenda are the Strategic Framework, Czech Republic 2030, which was adopted as the new national sustainability strategy, and the new Development Cooperation Strategy. The latter

highlights local ownership of development policies, inclusive participation in decision making and development partnerships between the government, civil society and private sector.

### *Interactive Debate*

Speakers highlighted additional initiatives that have fostered participation in support of the 2030 Agenda. The United Nations Environment Programme, for instance, has introduced an e-portal, providing a platform for major groups and stakeholders to contribute to resolutions. South Sudan has been making strides in women empowerment, which represents a critical requirement for poverty eradication efforts. Participatory budgeting is recognized as a powerful tool, with Seoul being one major city that has implemented the strategy. Participants also stressed that the SDGs act as a vital tool to bring stakeholders together, including at the national level where local expertise is needed to translate the goals to national contexts.

Speakers emphasized the need to foster the sharing of information among stakeholders to foster participation and overcome information asymmetries. There needs to be a culture and an incentive system for participation so that broad engagement can be fostered for SDG implementation. Building trust and achieving scale were underlined as critical to reach all relevant stakeholders through participatory initiatives. Speakers also highlighted the importance of engaging civil society and other stakeholders in the VNRs at the HLPF.

### **Open Presentation of Participatory Projects and Discussion**

Several speakers took the floor to present national strategies and positive practices in implementing the 2030 Agenda and advancing participation of all. Common themes from the presentations included efforts to integrate the SDGs into national development plans and to advance implementation of the Agenda at the local level and ensure the participation of stakeholders. Several countries, including Spain and Egypt, as well as the OECD, called for stronger cooperation at the global level to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Armenia, Thailand, Morocco and Uganda have advanced Agenda implementation by integrating the SDGs into national development plans, while considering national contexts and priorities. In Ethiopia, the 2030 Agenda has been integrated into the national development plan, referred to as Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP). Last year, Ethiopia presented its second GTP as part of its VNR at the HLPF. To advance localized strategies for sustainable development, Ethiopia has established a federal system of administration with power devolution to communities. This institutional mechanism has facilitated participation of all in the advancement of sustainable development.

Azerbaijan has established a National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development building on broad-based and inclusive stakeholder participation.

China has taken extensive steps to integrate the SDGs in national policies relating to all dimensions of sustainable development. In the economic realm, China has introduced National Innovation Demonstration Zones to promote innovation for sustainable development. In the environmental realm, China has taken concrete steps to curb pollution and address environmental degradation. Moreover, China has built a strategic alliance among partners and Government to advance the SDGs at all levels. At the global level, China has collaborated closely with the United Nations, including through financial assistance to capacity building initiatives.

In the Philippines, the 2030 Agenda was integrated into Abisyon 2040, the national vision for development, through extensive consultations with all sectors of society and at all levels of government, including the local level. Strong links were established to various stakeholders, including academia. The national implementation strategy also included extensive outreach and public communications campaign to create awareness of the Agenda. Other countries have taken similar approaches to communicate the SDGs to the wider public.

Spain has strengthened public engagement for the SDGs through a close consultation with civil society that will play an integral role in the country's VNR at the HLPF. At the national level, Spain introduced a National Plan for Equality of Opportunities to strengthen the empowerment of women in the economic, political and social realms. To advance inclusion and participation of all, Turkey has focused its efforts on the empowerment of women, children and youth, as well as persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Development, as the national focal point on sustainable development, has developed inclusive implementation policies in consultation with all relevant stakeholders as a way to align the SDGs with national policies.

### **Field Trip to Kolín, Czech Republic**

The field trip to Kolín, Czech Republic, provided an opportunity to engage with the Mayor of Kolín, Mr. Vít Rakušan, an innovator and active promoter of participatory approaches at the municipal level and to experience the impact of these approaches on the life of the citizens of Kolín. In order to showcase specific initiatives, the meeting featured presentations of participatory approaches that engage citizens for the betterment of their community. The field trip attracted a wide range of participants, including from UN Member States, UN system representatives and the Czech government. The field trip featured a walk across town, with opportunities to experience key city sights and learn about their significance to the local population.

In his keynote address, Mr. Vít Rakušan, stressed several key aspects of sustainable development and matched these to the requirements for prosperous communities at the municipal level. In this vein, peace, reconciliation, economic growth, environmental protection, education, a shared global vision and development strategy are mirrored at the local context by safety, community life, local economic growth, a healthy town space, schools of high quality, the participation of residents and a municipal strategy, respectively. The leadership of the mayor at the local level is key in ensuring all of these critical requirements are met according to the needs of the citizens. Participatory approaches serve to inform what these needs are and what the citizens require to thrive within their communities.

Engaging youth from early on, including by promoting teaching of local history to school children, is critical to create a sensitivity of what community life entails. As a medium-sized city in the Czech context, promoting this sensitivity is critical in order to ensure that young people stay or come back following university studies to become entrepreneurs and help drive the local economy. To provide a dedicated space to young entrepreneurs, Kolín is providing a dedicated space for young people to establish companies. The initiative has been very successful and contributed to the advancement of an entrepreneurial spirit on which Kolín can thrive.

With regards to participatory approaches, the mayor highlighted several platforms that Kolín uses, including an online city app, called “Kolín v mobile” (English: Kolín on the mobile), which integrates a wide range of services for citizens within one app. In providing platforms for citizens’ engagement, Kolín is building on the close interaction with all relevant stakeholders, including the police and schools. There are also opinion surveys on construction projects, which allows citizens to voice their opinions and create ownership among the municipal population for new projects. Such approaches ensure that citizens’ needs are appropriately served. Past projects have also engaged the planning committees and architects to ensure transparency and listen to the citizens’ opinions.

The city of Kolín also uses the Czech online platform “Lepší místo” (English: better place). A representative of the platform delivered a presentation on the scope and objectives of its work. The platform can be accessed through the internet, including on mobile phones, and provide citizens with the opportunity to raise concerns that they encounter in their everyday life in the municipal context. This may include public spaces that require cleaning and public infrastructures that require renovation or upgrading, among many others. By directly sharing a photograph and comments as well as the location of the issue with representatives of municipal government, the issues can be swiftly addressed and the “claim” can be marked as resolved. Lepší místo also acts as a social-responsibility platform that engages both civil society organisation and the private sector in collaborative initiatives to better communities. The app is available in a range of Czech cities, including Kolín and Prague. One challenge of the platform is the financing model, which requires further development to become financially sustainable.

In closing the interactive discussion component of the field trip, the Mayor of Kolín, Mr. Vít Rakušan, stressed that “no city is better than its citizens”. Local governments have the responsibility to shape the communities according to the needs of the citizens. Participatory approaches can provide a strong link between municipal governments and the citizens that can act as catalysts for the betterment of communities.