



Key elements for FfD4 engagement modalities with civil society

1. The road from Monterrey and the establishment of the Civil Society FfD Mechanism

Civil society engaged in the FfD process since its early days and, in accordance with the Monterrey modalities, was recognised as an integral part of the FfD process, along with other societal constituencies. However, until FfD3, interest was limited, also given the weak follow-up process, and there were only 8 or 9 networks that informally coordinated civil society participation in collaboration with the FfD Office. Because of the flurry of interest as FfD3 approached, there was a wide and open call to discuss how civil society coordination could be best organized and a decision was made to stimulate engagement of a wider array of additional networks, leading to the formal establishment of the Addis CSO Coordination Group, with more members, all of them being civil society networks. Over the years, this became the Civil Society FfD Mechanism.

The main logic behind the pre- and post-FfD3 arrangements was the recognition that being FfD a primarily intergovernmental process, civil society as a stakeholder gets limited space in terms of speaking slots, side events and other engagement opportunities. Whoever takes up such limited space would not be speaking for his/her organization but, in that context, would be representing “civil society”. It was therefore necessary to put in place processes to determine what messages would be communicated. Civil society is a very diverse constituency with equally diverse views, but it is essential that the messages conveyed to UN Member States in the context of FfD negotiations are the result of an open and inclusive process of convergence and prioritization. This is where civil society self-organization remains fundamental.

We are pleased to report that civil society interest for FfD4 is increasing at high rate. We are registering many newcomers to the Mechanism every week and we have now planning a set of activities to ensure newly interested organizations can effectively engaged in the process:

- The [Introductory Guide on FfD](#) is now available in English, Spanish, French, Arabic, Russian and German, and it is supported by thematic and regional briefs that can help newcomers better understand the world of FfD.
- The Mechanism maintains active [thematic workstreams on all FfD Action Areas](#) and regional groups. All newcomers are invited to join the workstreams of their interest and participate in the thematic preparations.
- All thematic and regional groups contribute to the assessment of negotiating drafts, ensuring that the Mechanism can contribute to the negotiations through a vibrant collective analysis, feedback and alternative text proposals for Member States consideration.
- Open preparatory meetings have been, and will continue to be, organized prior to every official FfD session, including before the Multistakeholder Hearing and all sessions of the FfD4 Preparatory Committee.
- Induction briefings for any interested civil society newcomers are now being organized monthly and open calls will be held to inform the wider civil society community.

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2. The initial steps towards Sevilla

It is therefore essential that the process towards FfD4 builds further on these well-established practices and strengthens the FfD modalities further in view of the continued recognition of the critical importance of civil society engagement and participation. Unfortunately, the post COVID-19 FfD

Follow-up phase and the initial steps of the preparatory process towards the First Preparatory Committee Session in Addis featured some regressive attempts to depart from the modalities established in more than 20 years of FfD engagement, including by undermining civil society self-organization in its sequence of interventions. While some of these dynamics have been rectified in the lead-up to the Second Preparatory Committee Session in New York, many continue to persist, and we would therefore like to bring them to your attention:

- The Mechanism has traditionally stewarded, in close collaboration with DESA, the accreditation and registration process (with no interference with the proper UN reviewing and vetting of applications) to support newcomers and invite them to engage with the Mechanism, should they wish to do so. The FfD3 website explicitly acknowledged the existence of the Mechanism and invited interested organizations to coordinate with the Mechanism for participation and interventions. Against this practice, and despite the recent adjustment of the FfD4 website, there was, and continues to persist, the refusal to inform new accredited/registered organizations of the existence of the Mechanism and provide them with contacts to coordinate and participate in the civil society preparatory meetings.
- Regression of the space provided for civil society interventions. Recent practice of restricting the civil society speakers to 'lead respondent' role is a regression from past practice where civil society speakers were invited to the main panels and roundtables. In the Addis preparatory committee session, this was further downgraded to 'first respondent from the floor'. In the context of the current FfD4 negotiations, it would be essential to intersperse civil society interventions in between Member States interventions, when possible, rather than relegate them to the end of each segment, as the latter limits the possibility of Members States to benefit from and react to views and comments by civil society, while respecting the intergovernmental nature of the negotiations.
- Lack of communication and invitation to the Mechanism with regards to thematic preparatory sessions that complement the official process. Rather than relying on civil society self-organization on how to best participate in these sessions (i.e., the Mechanism is structured with very active thematic workstreams that correspond to the FfD pillars), invitations to civil society representatives were cherry picked by DESA staff.

Following some of these circumstances, a meeting with representatives of the Co-Chairs of the Preparatory Committee and DESA was organized in Addis Ababa and some of these regressive attempts were mitigated. We certainly appreciate the efforts made in this respect. However, the overall trend continues to feature a widening gap between the rhetoric on the importance of civil society and the concrete opportunities for engagement, despite the historical FfD modalities that pioneered the substantive participation of civil society in every step of the FfD process.

3. Key modalities for civil society participation

It is essential to restore the spirit of Monterrey and reaffirm the pivotal importance of civil society participation and civil accountability. Here the critical pillars of the modalities:

3.1 Strengthening substantive participation

- While respecting the intergovernmental nature of the process, civil society should be enabled to fully participate in all segments and sessions of the process, including as observers to the negotiations with the ability to intervene when deemed appropriate. Civil society representatives have always been in the room in the FfD negotiations, including in all informal sessions of the Addis Ababa preparatory process.
- Civil society should be enabled to fully contribute to the outcome negotiation process by ensuring that all negotiation drafts and compilation texts with Member States' positions are shared at the same time as Member States to enable timely contribution. In the FfD3 process, one representative of the Mechanism (at that time, the Addis Ababa CSO Coordination group) was included in the

distribution list and could therefore timely receive revised drafts, proposed new text and schedule of negotiating sessions (See Annex 1). The inclusion of civil society in the regular distribution list was abruptly terminated in the immediate post-COVID phase, erroneously claiming that this was “past practice” while in fact it was the opposite.

- Building on established practice, civil society should be given the right to contribute, intervene and respond – and consequently be granted a number of civil society speaker seats - at the Roundtables, the High-Level Segment and any other portions of all official FfD meetings. To the extent that panels will be appointed to offer initial remarks in roundtables and plenary discussions, civil society, as a key constituency of the FfD process, should be allowed to nominate at least one representative to such panels. Recent practice of restricting the civil society speaker to a ‘respondent’ role is a regression from past practice where civil society speakers were invited to the main panels and roundtables. It remains understood that, to preserve the intergovernmental nature of the meeting, it is at the discretion of the chair to determine how many times civil society will be able to intervene in each session (as long as the same treatment is given to all actors that are not governments). In this respect, private sector representatives are increasingly being invited as panellists, therefore receiving preferential treatment over civil society.
- Civil society should be consulted by Co-Chairs, Co-Facilitators and relevant UN staff on the decision of themes, sub-themes and guiding questions or objectives of the sessions, including roundtables and high-level segments, given that these themes and questions frame the content of the meetings.
- Participation in every segment of the FfD process should be accessible to all registered civil society representatives, including persons with disabilities (considering e.g., physical access, accessible communications), and civil society be granted adequate spaces to hold its briefings, preparatory sessions, and side events. Civil society should also be allowed to circulate its positions and proposals to UN Member States at the sessions and appropriate space should be organized for civil society documentation to be placed and picked by Member States at their discretion.
- Civil society should be provided space for campaigning. At FfD3, civil society campaigned with banners, mascots, press conferences, etc (eg: <https://images.huffingtonpost.com/2015-07-28-1438111329-720814-global-tax-body-at-FfD3570x332-thumb.jpg>). This democratic space should be upheld in the FfD4 process as well.

3.2 Respecting Civil Society Self-organization and the role of the Civil Society FfD Mechanism

The critical principle for effective modalities is to respect and leverage civil society’s self-organization in the FfD process and space. Since Monterrey, civil society’s coordination evolved from the initial core and structured itself into a fully-fledged Mechanism which is well-recognised both with UN Members States, UN agencies and civil society. The Mechanism is built around the following principles and understandings (please visit the governance pages of the Mechanism [here](#)):

- Clarity on the notion of civil society, also considering that many business and industry associations are now registered as NGOs. The understanding of civil society that is embraced by the Mechanism is that of public benefits non-for-profit organizations, networks and movements. This notion of civil society traditionally also embraces workers and trade unions. The mechanism is therefore restricted to this category of organizations while other arrangements would need to be found for academia, research institutes and think-tanks; consultancy firms, business and industry; foundations and other philanthropies; and local authorities, among others.
- Open and inclusive character: Engagement is open and accessible to any interested organization of the above-mentioned category and managed transparently and democratically. All interested

organizations that meet the eligibility criteria are invited to join a common list, participate in the collective process, and engage in thematic and regional workstreams to shape common positions.

- Sharing of information and facilitation of engagement for newly interested organizations: A key role of the Mechanism is to provide information and opportunities for engagement to the wider civil society community through its Introductory Guide to FfD, open calls and briefings, and the ongoing cross-fertilization of FfD information across many civil society platforms, conferences and events.
- Balanced and representative coordination: The facilitation/coordination of the mechanism includes balanced regional representation (and therefore expressing a Southern majority), gender, and thematic competence.
- Other examples: There are plenty of examples of engagement mechanisms of this type, such as the Civil Society and Indigenous People's Mechanism for the Relations with the Committee on World Food Security, the Regional Engagement Mechanisms for Regional Sustainable Development Fora, the Major Groups and other Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, to name a few)
- The Civil Society FfD Mechanism is an active member of the Major Groups and other Stakeholders Coordination Mechanism, therefore being recognised by other civil society and societal actors, as well as the entire UN System, as the official engagement mechanism for the FfD process.

3.3 Implications of self-organization on engagement modalities

- UN Member States and the UN Secretariat should acknowledge and appreciate the Civil Society FfD Mechanism as the self-organizing inclusive mechanism for civil society engagement in the FfD process. This was already the case in the lead-up to the Addis Conference ([See FfD3 Website](#)) where any interested civil society organizations were invited to coordinate through the Mechanism (at that time under the name of "Addis CSO Coordination Group") on the official webpage of FfD3. The same notation was present in the preparatory webpages for the FfD Forum Sessions that followed the Addis Conference. Subsequently, the FfDO website had also recognised the Civil Society FfD Mechanism as the official civil society engagement mechanism.
- Civil society will autonomously designate participants and speakers for official sessions, consultations, expert meetings and any other sessions being organized as a part of the FfD process and the lead-up to the FfD4 Conference. Rather than cherry-picked individual invitations, the Mechanism should be notified of relevant opportunities for participation, including in any official preparatory sessions, so that it can collectively define its designations.
- Civil society designated speakers on the FfD Forum programmes have been identified with their affiliation plus the affiliation of the Mechanism, to emphasize their intervention on behalf of the wider collective rather than their individual organizations. Once again, this well-established practice was abruptly challenged in the first Prep Comm of FfD4 and then properly re-instated mid-way through the Addis programme.

3.4. Private sector participation

Over the past years, and also since the July Addis session, we are also witnessing the strengthening of the process of engagement with the private sector. In this respect, we would like to share relevant excerpts from an official statement by the Government of Brazil in the FfD3 preparatory process ([link to the full statement here](#)):

"There must be a strong component of civil society participation in the preparatory process for FfD3, as well as at the Conference, to ensure sufficient attention is paid to the social, human rights and environmental dimensions of sustainable development that nongovernmental groups cater for. Though facilitators in their proposed roadmap refer to civil society alongside the business sector, it

must be recognized that treating those two groups as equals does not ensure effective equality of participation. Mainly, because we are dealing with different constituencies, very asymmetrical in their respective capacities to influence, to access decision-making and to fund. Civil society at the UN is much larger in number, works towards extremely diverse people-centred, grassroots (often competing) thematic agendas, and has to overcome many more barriers to make its voice heard compared to the private sector. Business as usual proceedings will not ensure civil society participation on an equal footing with the private sector; as CEO's, usually representing large transnational corporations, philanthropic offspring or alliances thereof, can more easily coalesce around business oriented agendas, with ease of access to UN high level decision-making and interlocutors, whereas civil society, in all its diversity, must struggle for small peripheral spaces at UN decision-making on a much a more competitive, and restrictive basis."