



To the kind attention of:

Co-Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee for FfD4  
Permanent Representatives and Observers to the United Nations in New York

Cc:

Mr. Li Junhua, Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations  
Ms. Shari Spiegel, Director, Financing for Sustainable Development Office, United Nations

April 14th, 2025

**Re: Elements of Concern on Civil Society FfD4 Forum in Sevilla**

Your Excellencies,

We would like to raise your attention on some points of concern regarding the Civil Society Forum in Sevilla, which is being organized by the Civil Society FfD Mechanism in close cooperation with the national, regional and local CSO coordination platforms in Spain, also active members of the Mechanism. As you are aware, the Civil Society Forum has been an integral part of the programme of all previous FfD Conferences, essential to the conferences' accountability, ambition and democratic nature.

The Forum will take place immediately before FfD4, on June 28-29, to convey a collective declaration to the conference. It will be open to all interested organizations, independently from their accreditation to the UN. It will provide an essential opportunity for engagement to all civil society organizations, social movements and other groups, including those that may learn of the conference late and those that may not have full accreditation to the UN system. Convening this space is of fundamental importance also to connect with the local, regional and national social fabric and break the global bubble in which some of the UN meetings take place. Hence the importance of hosting the Forum prior to the main conference and outside of the restrictions of participation during the official conference days.

Unfortunately, to our great regret and surprise, we learned that no arrangements had been made for the Civil Society Forum, despite past history and the well-established understanding that every UN FfD Conference as well as all major UN Conferences have always been accompanied by such a Forum. For instance, the FfD Forum in Addis Ababa was opened by the UN Secretary General and featured 700 participants. It was an integral part of the Conference, even if it took place outside of the UN Blue Area, and the Declaration of the Forum was presented in plenary and posted on the [official page of FfD3](#).

Such provisions were not planned for the FfD4 Civil Society Forum. As we started preparing for the Forum, we were surprised to learn that only the Business Forum was part of the hosting agreement between Spain and the UN Secretariat and not the civil society one, disrespecting well-established FfD modalities and practice. We were then confronted with a narrative that assigned the complete responsibility of hosting the Forum to civil society, outside of the hosting agreement of the main conference and with no resource allocation. Despite our requests, to date we have not yet managed to

have either a formal or an informal tripartite meeting with both DESA and the Host Country. We appreciate that the Spanish Government have now agreed to support the logistical expenses of the Civil Society Forum, even though they had not received indication from DESA that it would be the responsibility of the Host Government to support with its logistics. Still, we need to continue to secure additional resources to ensure adequate participation from the Global South.

Despite the support from the Government of Spain, the lack of consideration of civil society's participation in the planning from the start has created significant hurdles for civil society's effective participation in the FfD4. We have been told the main conference venue, the only venue in Sevilla capable of hosting such a large number of people, cannot be made available for the Civil Society Forum due to security concerns. The only venue available at this stage is suboptimal as it does not have sufficient capacity to host all expected participants, imposing a complex selection process which may generate significant frustration, particularly among those that see the Forum as the only opportunity to engage in the FfD4 process.

It has also been quite concerning to experience the disparity of treatment with the Business Forum, which will be hosted within the main premises of the Conference and is being actively promoted by DESA. We have asked some questions on the financing of the Business Forum and the accreditation procedures for the business community, given the accreditation process is fairly cumbersome for civil society. The responses we have just received imply that the Business Forum was considered since the start of the FfD4 Conference planning process and was therefore integrated within the main premises, while the Civil Society Forum was not taken into account at that early stage.

Civil society is equally a stakeholder of the FfD process, and participated consistently and constructively throughout every session, bringing expertise and real-life knowledge, and raising the ambition with concrete proposals every step of the way for years, basically since the very start of the FfD journey. It is unfortunate that DESA did not consider it necessary to include us at the start of the planning process and our active engagement was not seriously taken up to the same level of importance as the business community, which has been less engaged in official sessions of the FfD Follow-up over the past 10 years.

Another critical area of concern is related to the VISA for participants from the Global South. Schengen visa applications, particularly for those from Asia and Africa, are extremely onerous with long waiting times to even secure a VISA appointment. Facilitating their VISA process would require an early registration process so that registration confirmation letters could be used to fast-track VISA procedures with Spanish Embassies in the Global South. We have therefore requested an early registration process with approvals on a weekly basis so that early registrants could advance their VISA applications as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the Conference registration is not yet open, and we have now been told that confirmations of registration will only be issued after the registration deadline in early June. This makes it practically impossible to secure VISAs and then secure affordable flights at the last minute, particularly in the early European summer. Such a state of affairs constitutes clear discrimination against Global South participants which contradicts the spirit of FfD and the values of the United Nations. The level of participation from the Global South – the fundamental rights holders of this process – would be seriously undermined unless the current registration modalities are revised.

We would therefore like to reiterate that the lack of adequate consideration of civil society in the planning of FfD4, including the Civil Society Forum, completely disregards the well-established modalities of participation of stakeholders and the privileging of the business sector in Sevilla is a deeply concerning trend for FfD. We call on all UN Member States to step in to correct this disparity and ensure that modalities are fairly implemented.

Lastly, we would like to reaffirm the notion that the arrangements for the Civil Society Forum should be an integral part of any future FfD Conferences and should be included in the overall framework of activities that need to be considered by the United Nations Secretariat and future Host Countries.

Sincerely yours,

Coordination Group of the Civil Society Financing for Development Mechanism ([www.csforffd.org](http://www.csforffd.org))

*The governance system and working procedures of the Mechanism are available on the website along with the full list of the members of the Coordination Group, exposing its scope, extent and diversity.*