forus CONNECT SUPPORT INFLUENCE

Semana Estratégica / Strategic Week / Semaine Stratégique

Santiago, Chile, 4-8 Sept. 2018

Short summary of the Forus Strategic Week 2018

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Organized in Santiago, Chile, from September 4th until September 8th, the Forus Strategic week gathered **55 National NGO platforms and Regional Coalitions,** coming from all regions. You can find here the list of members representatives.

The events included the third Forus General Assembly, a high-level policy debate co-organized with the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) as well as capacity development activities for members, and meetings with Chilean civil society activists.

Other very important events were organised in the sidelines of the Week, namely the Forus' Leadership Development program workshopand the General Assembly of Mesa de Articulacion, Forus' regional member in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The **overarching theme of the Strategic Week was "Connect, Support, Influence"**, reflecting Forus' own mission:

CONNECT - Enhance synergies & foster collaboration

SUPPORT - Share expertise & enable peer-to-peer cooperation

INFLUENCE - Promote transformative political, economic and social change

The objectives for the Strategic Week included the strengthening of solidarity across civil society globally; sharing success stories as well as challenges for the defense of an enabling environment and for the implementation of Agenda 2030 and reflecting together on a new narrative on civil society's role and the mission of Forus in this framework. This was achieved through peer exchanges among NGO platforms and coalitions, as well as debates with other prominent civil society figures and with high level institutional representatives from regional and international organizations.

Some of our **partners** joined us for the key political debates : the French Development Agency, the French Foreign Affairs Ministry, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean(ECLAC), the European Union's Delegation in Chile, the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Worldwide Initiatives for Grantmaker Support(WINGS), the Deputy Regional representative for the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, the former Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the President of the Senate of Chile as well as representatives of Chilean civil society organizations etc.

The **feedback received from the participants was extremely positive**, reflecting the richness of the discussions, the relevance of the topics addressed but also the need for more direct interaction and solidarity between peers, in these challenging times for people and democracies. . The moments of conviviality and celebration, the opportunity to meet and discuss informally with colleagues were also highly appreciated. This gathering was a key step in Forus' efforts in building a community of CSO leaders.

The **change of brand**, from the International Forum of national NGO platforms (IFP) to Forus, was also very commended by members, who embraced very naturally the new name and identity during the Week. The collective feeling of belonging to the Forus family was very prominent, as noted by external stakeholders that joined us for punctual discussions.

All these positive results would not have been possible without the **dynamic, diverse and constructive participation** from all. Attendees shared that they felt in a safe and inclusive space, where the plurality of voices was embraced and where genuine dialogue was enabled. We thank everyone sincerely for their commitment and inputs.

OVERVIEW OF DISCUSSIONS AND DECISIONS

Organized 10 years after the creation of Forus, the Strategic Week also represented a milestone for a general review of the collective achievements, and more importantly, for strategic discussions to inform our orientation and focus for the period 2020-2025. You can still find under this link, in English, French or Spanish all the support documents that provide background information on all topics.

Among the main achievements of the General Assembly, we can mention:

-the endorsement of the composition of the Forus Council, for the 2018-2020 mandate

- the approval of the 2015-2017 activity and narrative reports (specific 2017 Annual report here)

- the approval of the 2018-2020 action plan and budget

-the vote of the new Statutes(by-laws), adding "Forus" as our official name

- the strategic debates on Forus' work on : Capacity development for CSOs; Defending an enabling environment for CSO; Advocacy and Agenda 2030; Role of NGO platforms and their evolution

- the debate with members and partners on a new narrative on civil society and Forus' role in "Building essential infrastructure for the NGO sector & encouraging the emergence of supportive ecosystems"

The peer exchange and learning workshops as well as the political debate organised in the ECLAC headquarters also contributed to the richness of the event.

The **defense of an enabling environment** and the growing restrictions of civic space was perhaps the subject that was most central in the exchanges between the Forus members. This gathering among peers allowed members to testify various situations experienced in repressive contexts. Political uncertainties in many countries lead to a global and shared concern on the trend of narrowing of civic spaces, coinciding with a rise of social tensions. Platforms used this opportunity to call for further mobilization and solidarity between themselves and Forus to deal with these situations. As far as the role Forus can play to support CSOs, members highlighted the importance of helping national platforms to engage with the UN system, identifying where funds to support civil society can be sourced, building the capacities of the national platforms and engaging in systematic as opposed to one-off interventions.

Similarly, Forus, in partnership with several other networks, plays an important role in **monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda**. Forus is committed to support the NGOs platforms at the national level to participate in the monitoring processes of the Agenda, in particular around the National Voluntary Reports. But activities are also being developed at the regional level, in collaboration with Regional Coalitions and at the UN level, with members and partners. Members also underlined the limits of the 2030 Agenda, not being ambitious enough and not being led by civil society. Forus has received mandate to focus specifically on Goals 16 (need to strengthen the human rights dimension of Agenda 2030, develop a culture of peace) and 17 (Capacity building , Financing for Development, Partnerships).

In terms of **Capacity development for national platforms and regional coalitions**, the discussion focused on Forus' current strategy as well as future trends. Members confirmed that capacity development is a central aspect of Forus' work, not to be considered technical goal on itself, but a means to creating and reinforcing a common and critical political agenda. Members discussed Forus' available resources to deliver and the importance of prioritizing activities with multiplier effects. Regarding the current strategy, members have reinstated their support as well as recommend an evaluation to get a deep knowledge on what has worked best. Regarding Forus' future capacity development strategy, it should focus even more on capitalizing, systematizing and sharing the knowledge existing in the network, through peer exchange and learning, creating bridges and partnerships on relevant topics. Some transversal priority thematics were mentioned, such as reinforcing the political role of platforms; organisational diagnostics and support to internal cultural shifts toward more democratic organisations (against sexist, racist and colonialist approaches); accountability & transparency; measuring impact and financial autonomy etc.

Special sessions on the **model and evolution of national NGO platforms** were organised, providing members a safespace where they could discuss about the platforms' added-value, their functioning and their challenges, but also their role in creating innovations and social change, creating bridges with other actors and renewing the collective "utopia" of a better world. Among the many common values defining platforms ,identified by members, we can mention: freedom, creativity, respect, quality of our actions, empowerment, critical posture, proactivity, diversity, accountability. Platform's relevance and crucial roles are stronger than ever inthe fight for civic space and democratic societies. There is a need to find ways to work closer with and learn from more disruptive actors, such as social movements, indigenous, feminist, trans, movements etc. Regarding Forus' role, the 3 words in the strapline (Connect, Support, Influence) are seen as very relevant to sum up our members' expectations. In addition to creating a privileged space where members can share, learn, strategize and influence together, Forus should be a strong and powerful voice to produce changes, fostering creativity and innovation. Forus should facilitate the development of a new utopia for civil society, and together with its members should take the leadership on that.

For the last afternoon, the General Assembly, joined by various partners, discussed about Forus' pilot initiative on **"Building essential infrastructure for the NGO sector & encouraging the emergence of supportive ecosystems"**. The overall objective is to strengthen NGO capacities, power and independence at national, regional and global levels. This would be achieved mainly by co -elaborating an updated narrative on the roles and responsibilities of NGOs in the 21st century and by providing support NGOs leadership and capacity development to enable them to effectively participate in building essential NGOs infrastructure & promote the emergence of supportive ecosystems from local to global. Members and partners welcomed very enthusiastically this ambitious proposal, strongly expressing their interest to support the pilot phase and contribute to it. Members acknowledged that Forus has a role in strengthening the multilateral system, since our connections are transnational and global, but rooted in local activities. As one participant put it, this initiative is "brutally ambitious" but will constitute a key step in building a "citizen multilateralism".

The closing session of the GA focused on **members' involvement in the implementation of Forus' strategy as well as partnerships with other stakeholders**. Members reinforced their commitment to the joint work, saluting the achievements and encouraging us all to continue the efforts to strengthen the network, reminding that "Forus is not only for us, but that Forus is us". Several examples of synergies between national, regional and global levels were shared, as well as practical ways in which Forus' members contribute to the network.

Longstanding partners, such as the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the French Development Agency confirmed their support to civil society and to Forus and expressed their interest to collaborate on the new Pilot Initiative. Other stakeholders such as WINGS or IDRC, expressed their support to Forus and mentioned possible type of collaborations on various thematic, such as the Enabling environment and the capacity development for civil society. ECLAC also commended Forus' work during the GA and during the public event on September 7, suggesting joint actions, namely around the monitoring and implementation of the Agenda 2030.

At the end of the 5 days, strong strategic directions emerged such as strengthening solidarity within the global civil society, sharing successful experiences and challenges to the defense of an enabling environment to implement implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the model and evolution of national NGO platforms, their involvement and possible partnerships with other stakeholders, and the development of a new vision on the role of civil society and the Forus mission within this framework.

NEW GOVERNANCE

To accompany these processes, a **new Council has been validated by the Assembly, following the online elections from July 2018**. A **new Executive Committee, under the leadership of a new President**, composed of the following members, was elected by the Council:

- Chair: Iara Pietricovsky (ABONG, Brazil)

- Vice-Chairs: Saroeun Soeung (CCC, Cambodia), Rilli Lappalainen (KEHYS, Finland) and Sam Worthington (InterAction, USA)

- Treasurer : Jean-Marc Boivin (Coordination Sud, France)

With a mandate for 2 years, the new ExCom is committed to work with the Council, the Secretariat and the members on the implementation of Forus' current strategy and the design of the priorities and key pillars of a new 2021-2025 strategic plan.

The **next Forus General Assembly is foreseen in 2020** and will also be organized alongside various other events relevant for members and partners.