FORUS VIRTUAL FORUM 2020

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THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING!

Dear All,

We hope this message finds you all safe and in good health.

Two weeks after the end of the Forus Virtual Forum, we wanted to provide you all with an overview of the very rich and vibrant discussions which took place.

Thanks to all of you who participated, we connected with each other, we shared our experiences, we stimulated debates and we jointly continued to define the direction of travel that Forus will take in the coming months and years.

Nothing replaces face-to-face interactions, nor the smiles, expressions and emotions that come with it; but we hope that we were able to provide an inclusive digital space for us all to link up again, to align our aspirations with our work and strategies, and to energize each other despite the challenges and tumultuous times that the world currently goes through.

We hope that you enjoyed the experience of the Forus Virtual Forum as much as we have. And we would like to hear from you on how we can learn and improve for future virtual meetings. Please do take a few minutes to complete our overall evaluation survey here.

Going forward, we are already reflecting some of the topics and activities that were discussed during the Forum in our priorities for 2021. We will also continue to collect the lessons learnt from this Forum, which will inform our capacity-development resources and future digital conversations.

We look forward to staying in touch, and would like, once again, to say a heartfelt thank you for your participation in the Forus Virtual Forum and your dedication to the Forus network.

Warmly,

The Forus Team.

FVF KEY FACTS

318

318 individuals representing Forus members & external organizations participated in the different FVF sessions

39

39 national platforms participated in the 2020 FVF, representing 57% of Forus' national platforms

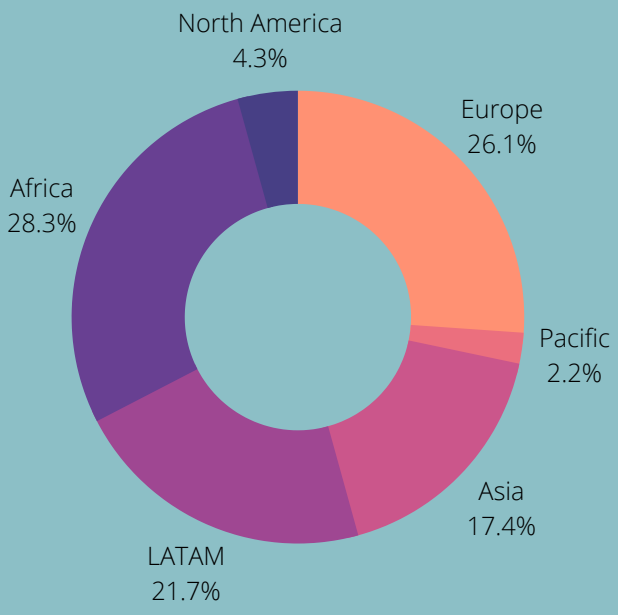
7

7 regional coalitions participated in the 2020 FVF, representing 100% of Forus' regional coalitions in Africa, Asia, Europe, LATAM and Pacific

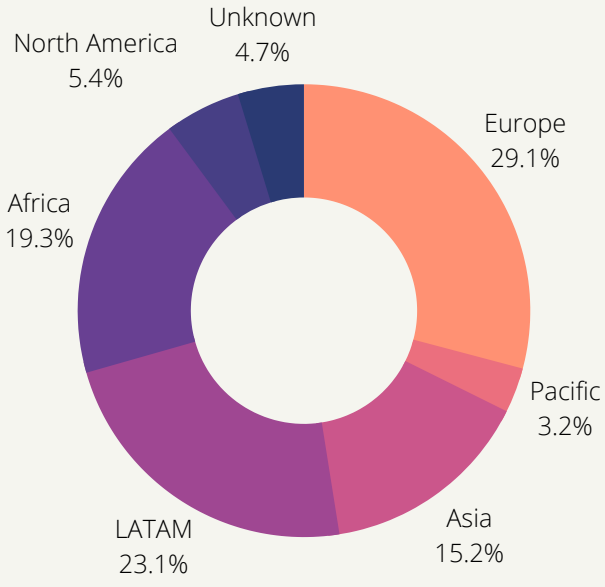
40

40 external organizations participated in the first edition of the FVF

Geographical distribution of Forus' members: national platforms & regional coalitions who participated in the 2020 FVF



Geographical distribution of FVF participants: Forus' members & external participants



LINGUISTIC INTEGRATION

1

All sessions were simultaneously interpreted in **English, French and Spanish** by **19 highly-skilled professional pro bono interpreters** located in **7 different countries**: Argentina, Canada, France, Mexico, Spain, Turkey and Uruguay.

2

All 19 pro bono interpreters received an **International Development & Civil Society Interpretation Toolkit**, composed by i) a **glossary** of more than **300 terms**, acronyms and expressions relevant to our sectors of intervention, ii) a **General Booklet** explaining Forus' projects, membership & mission and iii) an **Individual booklet** describing in detail the session(s) in which they participated.

3

A **2-hour online International Development & Civil Society Interpretation Workshop** was organized 1 week before the FVF. Furthermore, an additional 1-hour workshop was held to help them further develop their capacities to interpret through the digital tools used for the FVF

Mexico: 11, **Spain**: 2, **France**: 2, **Canada**: 1, **Argentina**: 1, **Uruguay**: 1, **Turkey**: 1

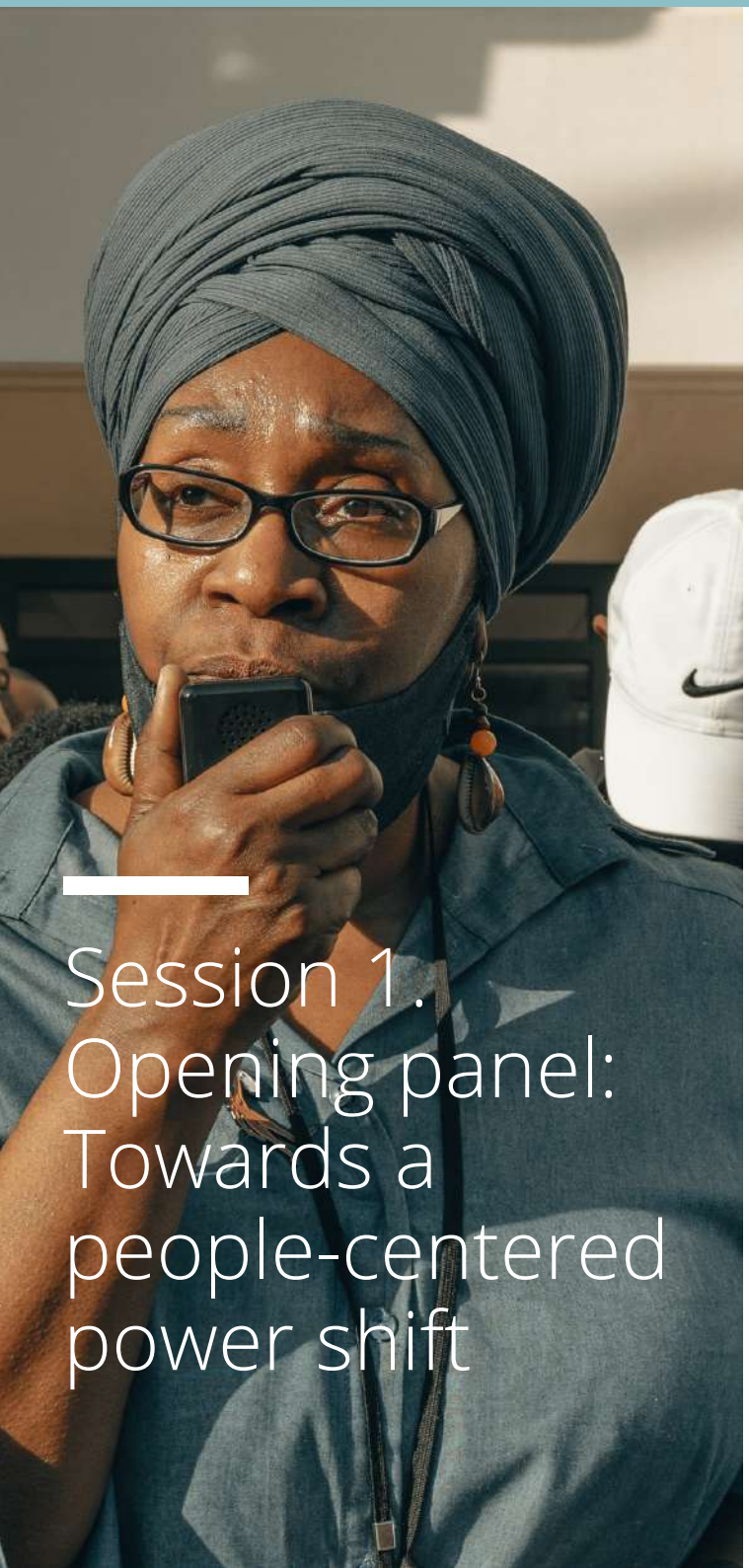
WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE 10 SESSIONS OF THE FORUS VIRTUAL FORUM?

The **Forus Virtual Forum** took place over **5 days** with 2 **sessions per day**. The first 3 days were open to external members, while the last 2 days were only open to Forus' members.

Below, you will find a **summary** of the different FVF days & sessions.

DAY 1: THE POWER OF UNITY AND DIVERSITY

THURSDAY 22 OCTOBER 2020



Session 1. Opening panel: Towards a people-centered power shift

Forus staff and governance members opened the Virtual Forum with welcoming the participants, acknowledging the impact of the pandemic (including the restrictions to civic space) and emphasizing the importance of meeting despite the pandemic.

Mariam Azeem (Director of Movement support and learning, Rhize), guest speaker, described Rhize's coaching process and the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on social movements. She explained the need for an adaptation to virtual space and building alliances.

She also recommended more people-centered approaches and continued efforts to document. The panellists shared their experience or views on a people-centered power shift.

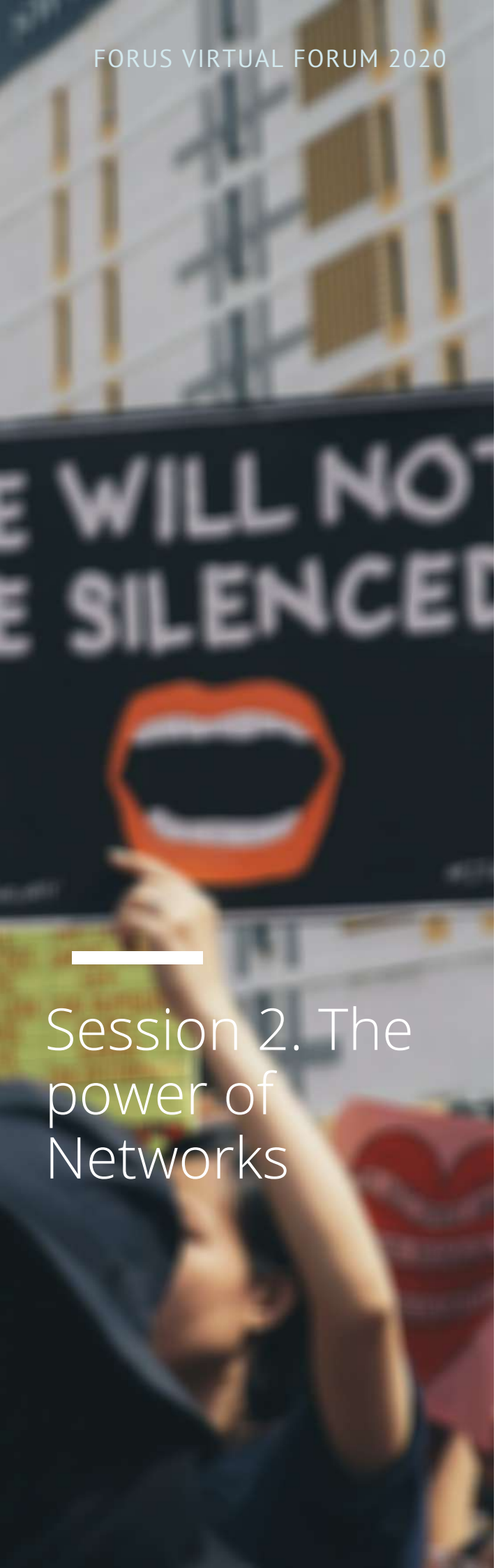
The Latvian experience of a successful decentralized multi-partner nation-wide covid-related call centre proved, Inese Vaivare (Director, LAPAS) recognized, NGO should be less paper-focused and become more agile and connected with existing movements.

National umbrella organizations in the Pacific Region, Emeline Siale Ilolahia (Executive Director, PIANGO) explained, are responsible for bringing the “voice of the voiceless” at government level, they should interact with informal movements and mobilize people, and advocate for resources allocated to this power shift.

In the dramatic Colombian political context, Liliana Rodríguez Burgos (Executive Director, CCONG) said, the paradigm of “care” (for organizations, people, environment), “offer of value” of CSOs and “non-economic transactions” are key. Shifting power means amplifying voices through coordinated actions with other actors, with the objective to change mindsets and create our own agenda.

As the pandemic exposed the vulnerability of societies and leadership fragmentation in Southern Africa, Glenn Farred (Executive Director, SADC-CNGO) advocated for a high level of ambition: a new paradigm through a new language and through “inverted spaces” (e.g. parallel events).

In the framework of the Presidential elections in Burkina Faso, the national platform developed an advocacy campaign and a “manifesto” on inequalities signed by the candidates, Juliette Compaoré (Executive Secretary, SPONG) shared.



Session 2. The power of Networks

With the participation of Nomvula Dlamini (Tamarind Tree Associates), Alen Maletic (Bridge 47) and Sonja Salminen (Bridge 47).

In this session we talked about the importance of civil society organisations and their networks. When we commit to working beyond our organisations, we must challenge ourselves in finding creative solutions to include all voices. Civil society needs to be conscious of the space they create for the voiceless and how the latter give meaning to their aspirations and struggles. As a subsystem of society, CSOs networks can create the space for the needs, inspirations and contributions of citizens believing in making a difference in the world.

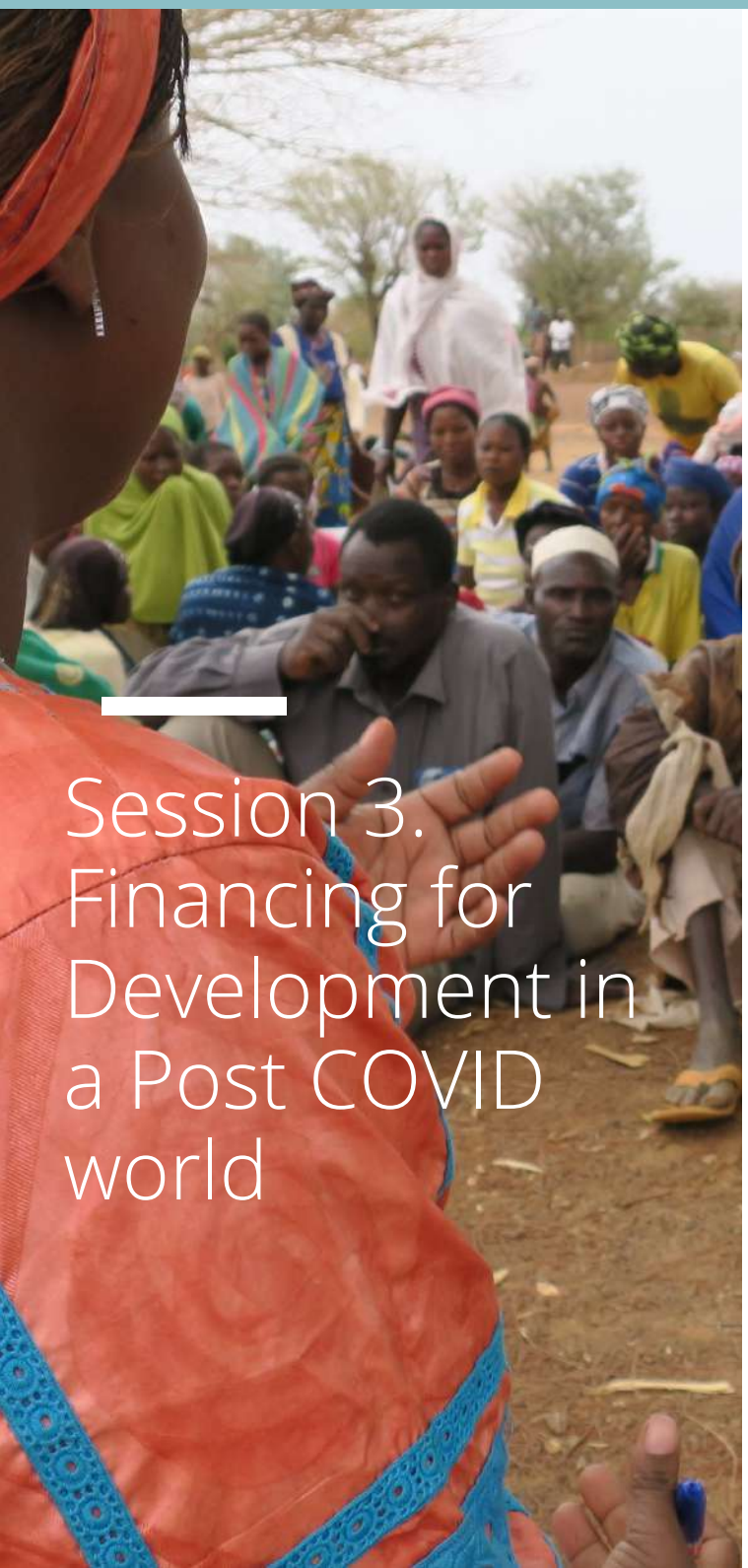
In order to have impact in social change, CSO networks need to acknowledge the interconnectedness of power relationships. We need to be a disruptive force to pressure the systems that exclude, marginalize and cause inequalities.

To do it, we need to collect energy from the whole network, including emotional, affective and intelligent parts of each person. We need to be very attentive to our own processes – programs need to be developed collaboratively in every step. We need peer-learning and self-criticism to make social change more effective.The more people we bring, more long-term and systemic solutions we find.

This session has been divided into 3 participative exercises. The first was imagining the networks we want to have in the future, one freewriting exercise about participants' experience in building, supporting and working with networks and one break-out session where participants discussed principles we should defend to bring social change.

DAY 2: TODAY'S CHALLENGES AND TOMORROW'S OPENINGS

FRIDAY 23 OCTOBER 2020



Session 3. Financing for Development in a Post COVID world

The first session of this second day aimed to shed light on the topic of financing for sustainable development, particularly in this period of pandemic. Moderator Iara Pietricovsky from Forus recalled the history of the financing for development agenda and its importance today in implementing sustainable development, a role that will be the main theme of the Paris' Finance in Common Summit in November 2020.

The first speaker, Maria José Romero from Eurodad, presented on the role of public development banks (PDBs). Her intervention recalled that PDBs should have a key role, but they do not play it enough. Indeed, PDBs are too often profit-driven and lack transparency and accountability, which CSOs must denounce.

The second presentation, by Stefano Prato of the Society for International Development, dealt with the need for a new economic order. Indeed, the current economic order concentrates wealth in the hands of a minority while the most vulnerable have no access to resources.

One of the important approaches is to look at an economic level situated between the macro and the micro: the meso economy. Another important factor is to give power back to national populations, and therefore to national CSOs. For the national level to regain weight, it is necessary to cancel and restructure sovereign debt, tax international financial flows and control technologies.

During the panel discussion, members of Forus underlined additional important elements such as the need to carefully consider the dimension of the private finance, the fundamental need to have a human rights based approach, and the role of CSOs in recalling this link. The national platforms in particular have an essential role in this renationalisation of the activity. Participants agreed that civil society must influence the financing agenda, that financial aid should not help the private sector to the detriment of the public nor of public goods, and even that financial aid should disappear in favour of a better collection of national taxes. There is a need to propose specific alternatives for a deep reform of the current system.

Participants also focused on the role of CSOs in the response to the pandemic, and the imperative to redirect decisions to the priorities on the ground, i.e. to change the system, not to endorse it.

Session 4. Safeguarding in practice: keeping people safe

In this interactive session, participants looked at challenges and solutions from various local contexts and organisational cultures. From wording and definitions to safeguarding in practice, we shared learning and knowledge about Safeguarding and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). In order to have impact in social change, CSO networks need to acknowledge the interconnectedness of power relationships. We need to be a disruptive force to pressure the systems that exclude, marginalize and cause inequalities.

In a collective exercise to define PSEA, we (re)discovered a wide array of meanings: from sheltering people from psychical and emotional violence, to safeguarding vulnerable groups, to protecting children, to following the no-harm principle and talking about gender dynamics. We discussed the difficulty in finding one only definition, specially in the framework of networks of CSOs, and focused on the overarching principles organisations have added to their institutional documents and embedded into their strategies, programs and activities.

Really introducing PSEA policies in organizational culture is an ongoing process. We focused on the importance of having governance and staff involved in the process, as well as of building partnerships with external organisations to develop approaches and measures taking into account different cultural contexts. Different organisations shared how they broke taboos around reporting and speaking up about abuses. They shared their challenges in finding time and resources to work towards mitigating and addressing sexual and gender-based violence; as well as the concrete measures they implemented to adapt to the covid-19 pandemic.

Besides Forus, this session had as facilitators and speakers: Aislynn Row (Digna – Cooperation Canada), Noelia Ruiz (Digna – Cooperation Canada), Carrie McElroy (Digna – Crossroads International) and Franziska Schwarz (Bond). Coordination Sud (France) shared their PSEA STRATEGY, including a Problem and Solution Tree which you can find here.

Forus presented its new toolkit: “Keeping people safe: a guide to safeguarding for non-government organizations and platforms”. The toolkit was crafted with recommendations from a working group of over 40 organisations and will be available in English, French and Spanish before the end of the year.

DAY 3: PATHWAYS FOR EFFECTIVE NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS

MONDAY 26 OCTOBER 2020

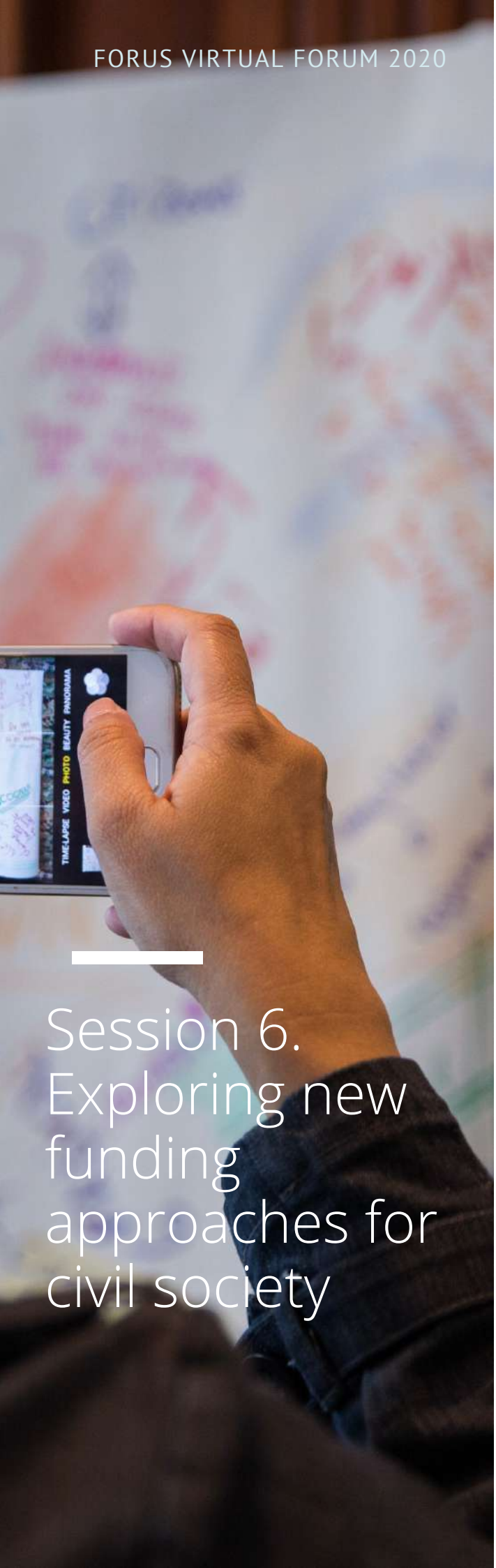
Session 5. Leveraging SDG 16 to defend and promote civic space

The 5th session of the Forus Virtual Forum focused on the opportunity to use SDGs to advance the demands of civil society, particularly the use of SDG 16 + to fight against the reduction of civic space globally. The invited speakers all stressed the enormous potential of international frameworks and agendas to push for this – for example by using the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) the 2030 Agenda itself, Human Rights mechanisms and procedures, and also national and global legislation. However, it was pointed out that some of these frameworks may have shortcomings, and should therefore be used in combination, to complement each other. For example, SDG 16, while referring to human rights in general, lacks precise indicators on civic space, as highlighted in the Forus/ADA report: Realising the potential of Goal 16 to promote and protect civic space.

Civil society must commit itself to using these agreements and agendas because its survival depends on it.

This commitment can take many forms: for example the production of citizen data on the state of civic space which can inform advocacy, and the continuation by CSOs of their watchdog role and avoiding being limited to the role of service provider, and above all maintaining links and connectivity between national civil societies in order to have more impact. To achieve this, various sources of funding must be found so as not to be overly dependent on any one source, and preferably to receive funding from relatively politically neutral bodies such as foundations.

Through presentations, questions and panel discussions, more than ten speakers were able to take the floor, both members of Forus and external speakers: Jyotsna Mohan Singh of ADA was the Moderator for the session and other speakers included Mandeep Tiwana (Civicus), Dima Yared (OHCHR's EU Office), Priya Sood (Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies), Deirdre de Burca (Forus Advocacy Co-ordinator) Pedro Bocca (ABONG), Oyebisi Babatunde Oluseyi (NNNGO), Sara Brandt (Global Focus), Leah Mitaba (ZCSD) and Arjun Phillips (VANI).



Session 6. Exploring new funding approaches for civil society

This session launched and debated around a Forus toolkit called “Exploring new funding approaches for civil society”. The toolkit is available in English, French and Spanish, with the videos presenting it accessible in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

The toolkit was developed combining literature review, to analyse trends in the field, and primary research with 20 interviews with a diverse range of networks and platforms from around the world. This allowed us to identify the six main recommendations in the toolkit: know your value; understanding the value of your membership; cultivate strong relationships with your existing donors; avoid single donor dependency; branching out and diversity for long-term sustainability; and turning threats into opportunities – which new possibilities exist from the situation you are in?

With an interactive pooling exercise, we engaged in a conversation about various aspects around funding opportunities and challenges for networks and platforms. We looked at how the development of an organisational Theory of Change helps platforms trace a clear path ahead and show their value. As a “living document” it allows flexibility, it can be modified and helps organisations achieve their goals. We highlighted the need for surveys as it allows platforms and networks to get closer to the needs of their members and collect data to shape financing. We discussed the need of slowly decreasing the dependence on a single donor, to value diversification and to balance effort and reward. We shared experiences finding new donors, nurturing a healthy and strong relationship with them.

We looked at establishing links with the business/private sector, building bridges of solidarity instead of competition between civil society, creating new spaces that value community-led initiatives and indigenous intellectual properties.

Examples of income-generating initiatives were examined, as well as the importance of volunteering and human resources. We discussed the need of civil society to be relevant, innovative and able to trigger a paradigm shift without compromising our values and essence. As much as civil society needs donors, donors need CSOs. It's a reciprocal relationship, and especially in the Global South it should move away from neo-colonial approaches. We discussed the external constraints that civil society faces, sometimes pressured to put aside its political role in order to access funding. We underlined the importance of innovating and creating partnerships to meet the needs of communities and access new opportunities.

Besides Forus, this session had as speakers and panellists: Rachel Haynes and Victoria Ireland (Flamingo), Saroeun Soeung - CCC (Cambodia), Liliana Rodríguez - CCONG (Colombia), Akmal Ali - PIANGO (Pacific), Monametsi Sokwe - BOCONGO (Botswana), Zoe Abrahamson - BOND (UK).

DAY 4: SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

TUESDAY 27 OCTOBER 2020

Session 7. Forus' 2021-25 strategy: what priorities for 2021

After an introduction by the Forus Chair, the Forus team presented the new 2021-2025 strategy, which is anchored in Forus' values and articulated around the 3 pillars: **"Connect", "Support" and "Influence".**

The Forus team presented elements of how to operationalize this strategy next year using this session as a sounding board for members to share their feed-back. Members could also specify their views through a series of short surveys, for instance on the top thematic priorities in 2021 where the topic of Enabling environment was most selected.

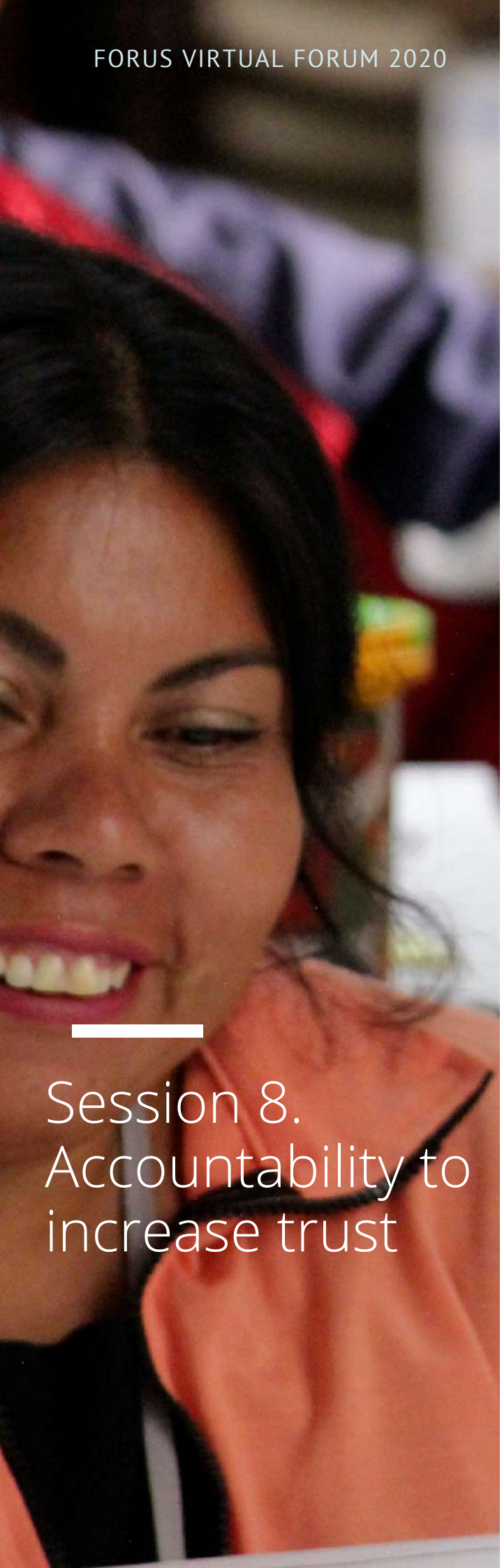
Forus members could also comment on the detailed activity plan proposed for each pillar and suggested the following priorities:

- **Connect:** strengthening connections inside the network as well as with other stakeholders, connecting despite/because of the pandemic, answering all needs of connection, strengthening our organizations and being accountable to members but also beyond that those whose voices and needs we put at the center of our action

- **Support:** strengthening capacities, reinforcing the Leadership Development Program, developing peer exchanges, developing shadowing/twinning programs…

- **Influence:** keeping a multilateral approach, sharing advocacy plans for being influential together, supporting linkages at local level, building synergies around post-covid policies, mainstreaming a human-rights approach…

While the Forus Vice-Chair wrapped up the session with an emphasis on how important it is to keep the network alive through dialogue and solidarity, the participants could identify untapped potential in the network through an online jam-board tool.



Session 8. Accountability to increase trust

In this session we explored the relationship between accountability and trust in network collaboration. We spoke about applying the Istanbul principles to partnership work, and how we can develop capacities for accountability and the challenges encountered.

In contrast to traditional accountability, dynamic accountability is an inclusive, participatory and bottom up approach. This approach is based on meaningful stakeholder engagement, an inclusive participatory and responsive way of collaboration, and letting people's voices drive our decision making. It helps reduce power imbalances and create systemic change .

In a network, dynamic accountability generates ownership, horizontal relationships and enhances collaboration and synergies. This is this mutual accountability that builds trust.

Some of our members shared their experiences of accountability and network collaboration :

Oyebisi Oluseyi, director of NNNGO platform explained his experience using the Istanbul principles for accountable partnerships, including with the private sector in the context of the Nigeria Economic Summit Group and Open Government Partnership. NNNGO showed how the Principles can be used to jumpstart conversations on accountability and meaningful partnerships with critical stakeholders. This provides a framework for effective collaborations that are inclusive, respectful of rights and gender aware.

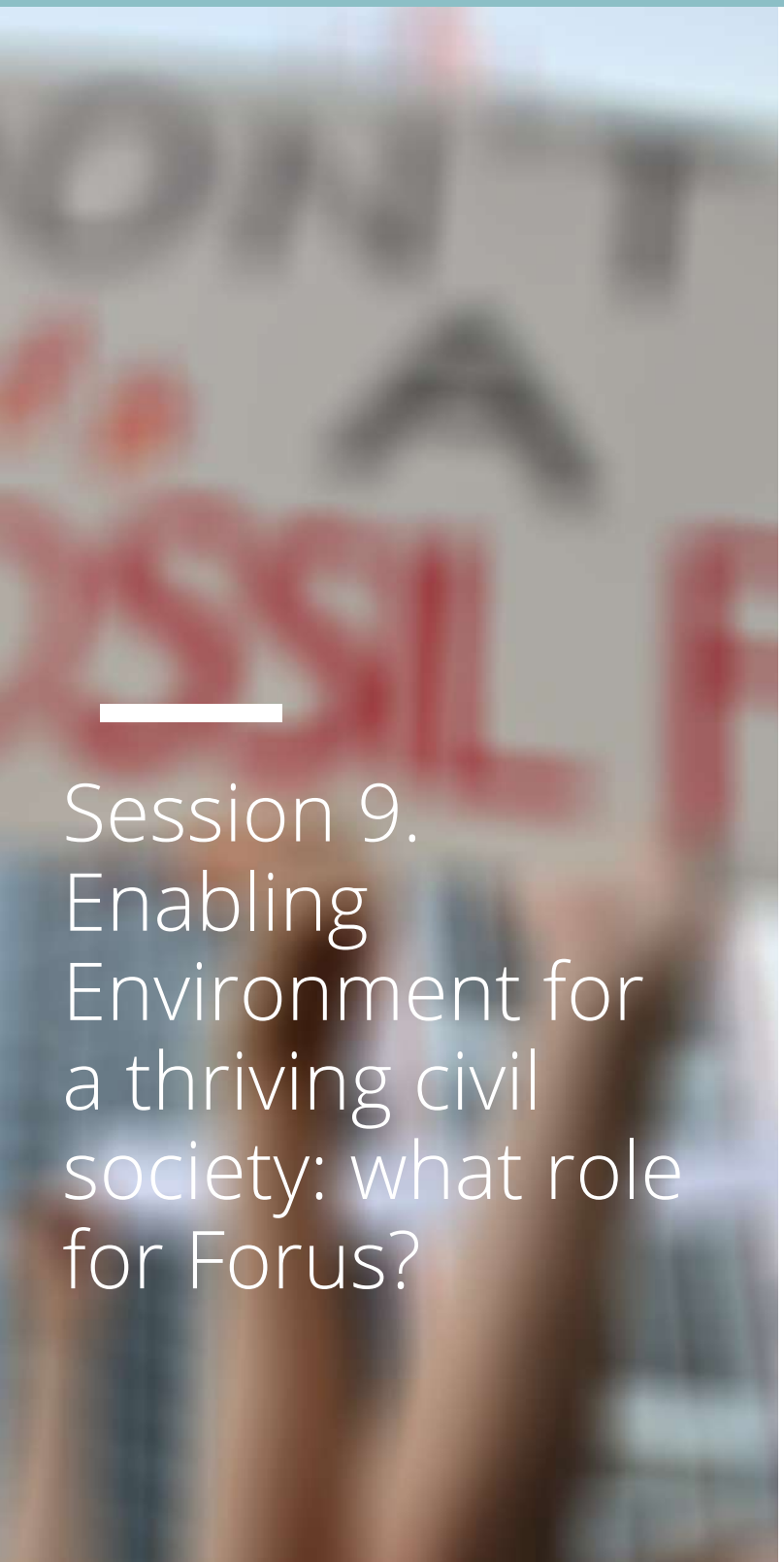
Jose Ramon Avila, director of ASONOG took the floor to speak on developing capacities for accountability and challenges encountered, especially in a political climate that does not favour transparency. For example, the pandemic in Honduras and many other countries has been an opportunity for governments to act in less than transparent ways. Government and CSOs should be accountable to build people's trust and then create a dynamic collaboration and participation. With this, legitimacy and credibility will be strengthened.

In order to assess accountability levels, Analia Bettoni from Rendir Cuentas has shown how networks can use Rendir App , developed by Rendir Cuentas and AGNA. Under the Global Standard framework, the App allows networks to self-evaluate and discuss improvements. Through scoring and recommendations, the tool helps us to plan for a better collaboration and more accountable organisations.

The session ended with a discussion on how to strengthen accountability in the Covid-19 context. The pandemic is not only a health crisis, but also a social and economic crisis. While it affects our ability to meet face to face, it should not affect our commitment to transparency, communication and participation as the basis of being accountable.

DAY 5: REALIZING OUR COMMON AGENDA

WEDNESDAY 28 OCTOBER 2020



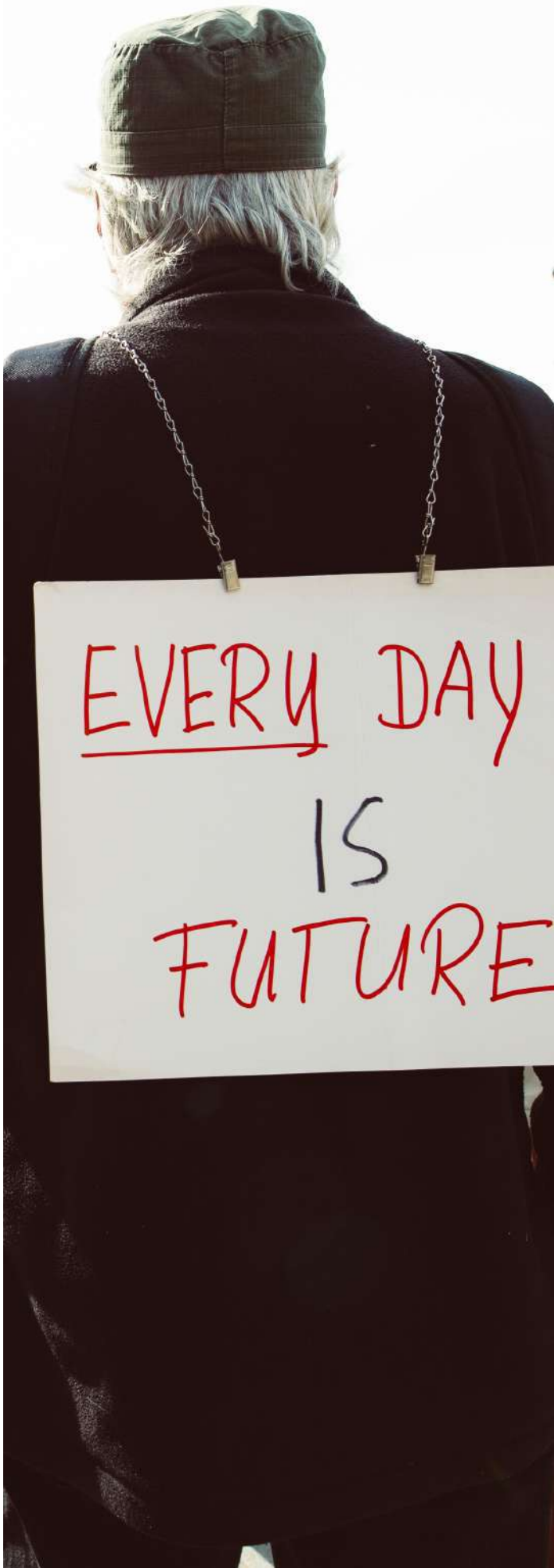
Session 9. Enabling Environment for a thriving civil society: what role for Forus?

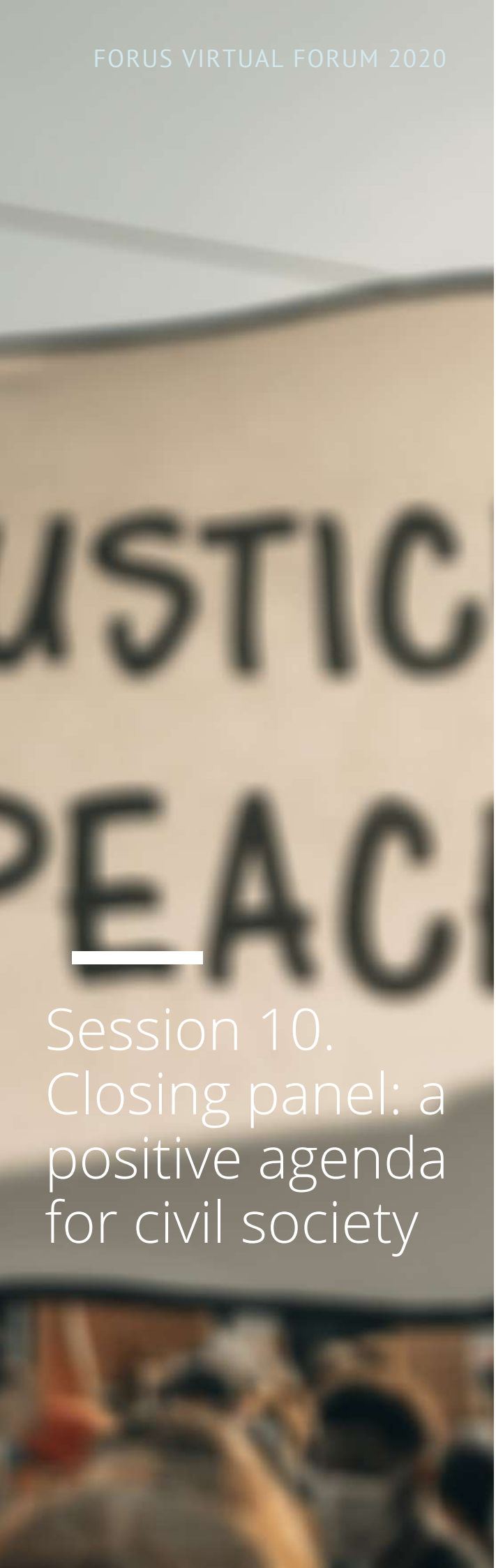
After an introduction by Forus Advocacy Coordinator, Ana de Oliveira (researcher, Cooperation Canada) presented key findings and recommendations (risk analysis, coalition building, support by global networks, strengthening transparency & accountability & resilience, dialogue with donors…) related to the Enabling Environment Scoping Study commissioned by Forus.

In a second time a panel discussion enabled Forus members to describe their national situation. Pedro Bocca (ABONG) emphasized the serious financial impact of the covid-19 pandemic on local CSOs already attacked by the Brazilian government. Tatat Sukarsa (INFID) shared a few positive changes in terms of CSO participation in Indonesia, but also gender disparities and conservatism issues. Leah Mitaba (ZCSD) described the Zambian legislative environment and the importance of international & regional advocacy support and networking.

Then participants broke out in small groups and could discuss:

1. **Women's rights organizations and promoting gender equality:** the participants emphasized the increased violence against women, celebrated a few victories; they recommend that Forus analyses and disseminates the impact of the pandemic; Forus could also support women's leadership and the capacities of women's right organizations.
2. **Digital Transformation:** the participants emphasized the digital divide (social and geographical aspects); the digital transformation enables increased contacts, social networks having a significant role, including communicating on CSO roles. In this context Forus could help the members to improve their communication strategies.





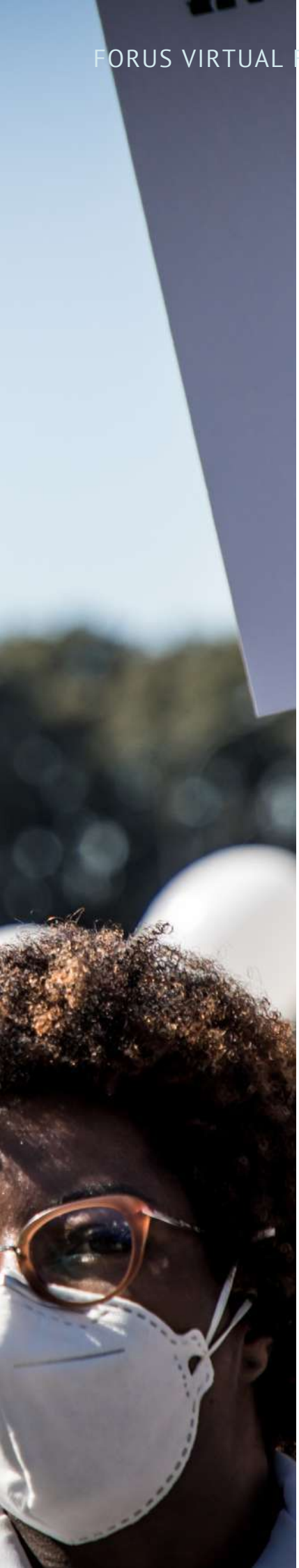
Session 10. Closing panel: a positive agenda for civil society

The Closing Panel of the Forus Virtual Forum 2020 wrapped up a very rich week which ended in: the spirit of **Forus' 2021-2025 strategy : a positive agenda for civil society.** We are operating in very difficult circumstances, witnessing a shrinking of civic space; the rights of communities around the world are curtailed. From Chile to the US, Cape Verde and Nepal, we heard from different speakers who all brought to the table their personal and collective experiences. The themes that emerged focused on solidarity, listening to diverse voices, practicing empathy and acknowledging the needs of communities. And last but not least, we reminded ourselves that we are all in this together, we all share the struggle to bring about positive change.

The closing panel kicked-off with Sam Worthington, CEO of InterAction and Vice-Chair of Forus. He discussed how we can move from theory to practice. He focused on how no individual organisation can shape the agenda; we have to work through networks, with each other. But we must also be able to engage in radical collaboration; getting out of our bubbles; branching out to new spaces. Civil society must become an inspiration for people and for governments. We need to have agile, adaptive leadership that puts mutual trust and mutual respect at its core. We live in very turbulent times, and how we lead through these times will depend on our networks. Our strength comes from our unity and values, and our ability to lead together. If they attack one of us, they attack us all. He talked about how it all comes down to the courage to imagine, to speak truth to power and to speak it loudly. The obligation to think both big and small.

Gie Goris , journalist and former editor of MO*, shifted the conversation to the connection – and sometimes tension - between civil society and the media. He advised CSOs, to "stop acting as the poor cousin of a rich corporate world" and to come up with honest narratives bringing to the surface inconvenient truths. Stop being spectators when it comes to the media, but rather invest in truly independent, investigative and committed journalism. "Media are not churches", he states, they are not built to make people believe. Gie sees hope not as an alternative to power or a refuge against despair, but as a phoenix, arising from active engagement, from daily humanity, struggle and political empowerment. Finally, he discussed the big challenge for media and CSOs today: the impact of social media, of their almighty algorhythms. He left us with a question: How can each of us use social media as an infrastructure to get the stories out, but at the same time, how can we together combat the disruptive monopolies of tech giants?

Jay Poudyal, humanitarian photographer and founder of Stories of Nepal, brought us back to the power of participative storytelling, mostly in remote and rural areas. He talked about the importance of understanding one's privileges, of giving the microphone and the power back to communities. He shared his approach grounded in active listening, with an open heart and mind, with empathy and mutual trust at the core of storytelling. He looked at the risks behind big tech and at how as people wanting to bring about change, we need to be vigilant about the platforms we use. Are we only relying on online spaces? Are we serving generalised narratives for quick consumption? Or are we also creating niche spaces that cater to communities whose stories we share?



We need to inspire people to have courage to tell their stories. Many communities live in constant fear of repercussions. Just for speaking the truth some people have been imprisoned, others have lost their lives. We all need to join hands to ensure that we still have the liberty to share our experiences, as stories can change the world.

Ximena Salinas, President of Codeff and Vice-President of Accion, talked about the historical changes happening in Chile and the rise of citizen participation. Hopes are high that the overwhelming vote to overturn the Pinochet-era constitution marks the beginning of a new era for all. Despite the pandemic the participation of voters was extremely high and the process of guaranteeing a fair referendum was achieved. She shared how the new constitution needs to take the voices of diverse communities into account, including indigenous communities, as well as the environment and the climate. In Chile there is momentum and she envisages a more prominent role for civil society. The people want to create a new reality, that's fair and just.

Jyotsna Mohan Singh, Regional Coordinator of the Asian Development Alliance (ADA), talked about the challenges in the region and the opportunities that arise from the struggle. She shared the importance of connecting directly with communities, of never losing sight of that, especially when working at national or international level. She talked about the importance of shifting away from donor-driven approaches, as in her words "we might not always have a lot of money, but we work all together".

Dirce Varela, Executive Director, Plataforma das ONGs de Cabo Verde (PLATONG), looked at the power of narratives and the battle of consciousness. We need to show that change is possible, and that it's not exclusive for certain members of society. Civil society needs to push this dialogue and be able to influence public policies, thus creating a real impact in the field of democracy and human rights.

Finally, Iara Pietricovsky, Forus' Chair, and Sarah Strack, Forus' Director, closed the Forus Virtual Forum by thanking everyone for their active and insightful participation and thank the Forus team and the team of interpreters who made it possible for Forus members and friends to connect throughout the Forum.

EVALUATION OF THE FORUM

Please do take a few minutes to complete our short evaluation survey so that we can learn from your Forus Virtual Forum experience and to help us improve future virtual meetings.

CLICK HERE TO ANSWER THE EVALUATION SURVEY

WE THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR FEEDBACK.

Pic credit: SPONG, Shaw, Forus, Midia Ninja, Ling, Both Nomads.