

# Summary of Global Initiative promoted by Forus & partners

## Introduction:

Current threats to international multilateralism are real and growing. This is a matter for grave concern to all those interested in a stable, predictable and co-operative international order. Multilateralism serves to bind powerful nations, discourage unilateralism, and give small powers a voice and influence that they could not otherwise exercise. Multilateralism refers broadly to relations between nation states, but other relevant actors increasingly have a stake in this system of global governance.

Civil society<sup>1</sup> has become an **important participant and stakeholder** both outside of, and within the current multilateral system and the politically liberal, rules-based international order in which it is embedded. Progressive civil society<sup>2</sup>, while very active at local levels, is cosmopolitan in its orientation and increasingly forms a **key pillar of the international system**, supporting and defending democratic values, universal human rights, as well as facilitating and promoting the achievement of shared goals. It understands the value of international institutions that have been created to enable nations and people to solve conflicts and to anticipate challenges through an inclusive and rules-based system. Many CSOs working on human rights, development, migration, environment and social justice, amongst other issues, experience and understand the crucial role that an **improved and more democratic multilateral system** can play in tackling issues that are transboundary and interdependent in nature.

It is a central aim of civil society to help to reinforce the links between the different stakeholders involved in complex international agendas, and to encourage the active participation of citizens and ultimately to influence public opinion. The active engagement of citizens and the mobilization of public opinion constitute the **backbone of genuine democratic processes** from the local to the international level. These are essential pre-conditions for ensuring that states and governments **deliver on the public commitments** they have made.

Civil society has also **played an important role in its own right in international agreements and conferences** in recent years, including in the negotiation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a universal agenda which sets global goals for all countries. Where this and other important international policy frameworks are concerned, progressive civil society groups perform

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<sup>1</sup> The term civil society is used repeatedly throughout this document. Given the breadth of potential organisations and actors that are covered by this term, when it is used in this document it refers largely to NGO and their networks who work to achieve sustainable social and economic development for all.

<sup>2</sup> Progressive civil society refers to CSOs who support and promote progressive politically liberal values including respect for opposing viewpoints, democracy, non-violence, the rule of law, regard for minorities, consensus in reaching decisions, individual & collective rights, freedom and respect for the media etc.

a **useful watchdog role** in monitoring the adherence of national governments to implementing international and regional agreements and conventions to which they are signatories. Furthermore, in the context of international agendas which aim to reorient global policy making in a given direction (e.g. sustainable development), civil society plays a critically important role **as an active advocate and “transmitter” of new ideas and values** at many different levels, from the local to the global.

### Description of the Global Initiative and its key objectives

The Forus Global Initiative is a **blueprint for the mobilisation, self-organisation and increased connectivity of civil society** across all regions of the world and at all levels, with support from progressive governments, international institutions and like-minded donors, with the aim of **safeguarding and improving the international multilateral system**. This global initiative aims to support civil society to develop a **new vision and contemporary public narrative** for itself in challenging times which will reinforce the relevance and effectiveness of the sector, and encourage greater public understanding of, and support for the work of CSOs. The initiative also aims to **strengthen the power, capacities, independence and future impact** of civil society around the world through identifying and learning from the successful strategies and approaches used by other influential sectors to increase their social, cultural and political impacts.

#### **The global initiative aims to:**

- ☼ Facilitate civil society (and the NGO constituency in particular) to elaborate a new vision of its role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- ☼ Promote high levels of public confidence in, and engagement with the sector and its work.
- ☼ Increase civil society's access to sustainable and predictable financial resources through going beyond a short-term, project-based approach to funding the sector and providing core and structural funding, while allowing for experimentation and innovation
- ☼ Learn from the strategies and approaches used by other sectors to increase their political influence and help to support the development of essential institutional infrastructure for the civil society sector.
- ☼ Promote the systematic capacity development of civil society globally, as means of creating a common political agenda and increasing the effectiveness of the sector
- ☼ Support an Enabling Environment for CSOs around the world
- ☼ Increase the international and regional coordination and enhance the connectivity of civil society networks at all levels
- ☼ Promote the transparency & accountability of civil society

## Leadership of the Global Initiative

Forus is a “network of networks”, a global network of NGOs working to promote sustainable social and economic development for all, and with a membership comprising 7 strategic regional coalitions and 69 national development platforms. Forus has the legitimacy to assume a leadership role in relation to a timely and innovative global civil society initiative such as this. However, **no single network can achieve the ambitious objectives of the global initiative without the support and collaboration of many other key partners.**

Other key global, regional and national civil society networks with a track record in one or more of the areas covered by the initiative will be **invited to be important partners and collaborators** in this work, as will a wider range of **strategic actors such as national governments, international institutions, philanthropic foundations and others** who will be invited to become involved in various ways in the initiative.

Forus and its members have considerable experience in, and bring a **comparative advantage to leading the work of the Global Initiative in the following areas:**

(i) developing a new narrative on civil society’s (NGOs) changing role in the 21st century; (ii) the capacity development of NGOs globally, (iii) the collective development of a global strategy to ensure the availability of sustainable and sufficiently flexible financial resources for the functioning & capacity development of NGOs globally, (iv) the greater international & regional coordination of civil society, and (v) identifying the need for, and helping to support the development of essential institutional infrastructure for the sector. In summary, this means Forus would take the lead on pillars 1,3,4,5 & 7.

It will be necessary and important to involve **other key global civil society networks in engaging in the work of these pillars and in leading other pillars.** These networks will already be leading specific initiatives and programs such as on Enabling Environment, CSO Transparency & Accountability, Public Mobilization & Global Citizenship Education, etc.

## Conclusion

Forus and its members are hopeful that major institutional partners such as the EU and others will recognise the **importance and the timely nature** of this ambitious global initiative. Indeed, we envisage the establishment of a **Global Initiative Advisory Committee** that would comprise major donors, relevant international and regional organisations, other NGO or CSO partners and private philanthropic organisations. They would help to **steer its work and provide advice and guidance** in relation to the work of its different pillars. Their support will be critical to civil society if it is to strengthen itself and to increase its effectiveness so that it can play an important role in defending and revitalising the international multilateral system.