Report: Civil Society Delivers Key Recommendations for Capacity Development

Some of the key overarching recommendations emerging from the report include:

- **A new global coordination and financing system for capacity development**
- **Identifying the 2030 Agenda capacity development needs of different stakeholder groups, including civil society**
- **Joint capacity development to encourage and strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships**
- **Clear definitions of capacity development agreed by all UN Member States for VNRs**
- **Greater focus on domestically oriented & multi-level capacity development for CSOs & other stakeholders**

Paris – July 14, 2020 – Forus and its members are urging accelerated action on capacity development for civil society organisations (CSOs) around the world. Capacity development was not mentioned at all by over one third of governments submitting their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on progress in implementing the SDGs.

"Capacity development should be an absolute priority for the international community," said Sarah Strack, Director of Forus. *"In light of the post-COVID recovery, civil society organisations need capacity development activities which are impact-oriented, needs-based, and which promote not only expertise exchange, but also local leadership and local solutions".*

A set of key findings were delivered as part of a new report shedding light on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17, looking in particular at capacity building for CSOs and other stakeholders. Developed with inputs from the Forus network, representing over 22,000 NGOs, the report comes as governments present their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on progress in implementing the SDGs at the United Nations High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable

Development this week. Forus carried out an analysis of the 2019 VNRs in order to determine how capacity development is being implemented by national governments and most importantly, whom it benefits.

Civil society plays a crucial role in societal resilience as witnessed during the COVID-19 crisis, notably in voicing people's needs and in the dissemination of knowledge and local resources. Forus believes that continuous capacity development and learning are absolute prerequisites to allow civil society to have greater influence and to shape domestic and international public policies.

Capacity Building and CSOs

The report – **Are governments delivering on the Capacity Development of Civil Society to ensure a successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda?** – unveiled an obvious gap between the supposed importance attributed to the role of civil society and the actual efforts made to strengthen them and their capacities.

Civil society organisations around the globe support and defend democratic values, perform a useful watchdog role, play 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. Despite their crucial role, civil society is mostly absent from capacity development efforts that take place at the national level.

"The Slovenian Government developed an inclusive, multi-stakeholder, and multi-level consultation process to draft the Voluntary National Review, but regrettably this year, the voice of civil society is not reflected. An enabling environment for civil society organisations is an intrinsic part of the full implementation of the "Leave No One Behind" principle, and only broad civil society ownership of the SDGs ensures achieving sustainable development for all," says Adriana Aralica, Policy and Information Officer at Slovenian civil society platform SLOGA.

Not If but How

The report unveils that governments often highlight capacity development in the context of international cooperation without mentioning capacity development in their domestic contexts. In many cases when capacity development is provided, it involves experts traveling from abroad instead of training local leaders to do so. Furthermore, capacity development is mostly understood as a tool for international cooperation that is employed by high-income countries. Lower-income and middle-income countries appear to be targets or beneficiaries showing a clear lack of reciprocity.

The report signals a clear need in all countries to scale up efforts to implement capacity development. There is little reference in the 2019 VNRs to government support for domestic capacity development and capacity development was not even mentioned by one third of reporting governments in the 2019 VNRs.

"Civil society organisations are producers of meaning and often have an important stake in the creation of social debates. Developing an informed, adaptable and reactive civil society should be a

priority, rather than a source of fear, for governments around the world, if they want to ensure a successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda," says Iara Petricovsky, Forus Chair. *"Capacity development requires a locally driven agenda, integrating activities at different levels to address complex problems" .*

Forus hopes the report will encourage increased consideration for capacity development to boost the ability of CSOs and other stakeholders to give voice to the concerns of their constituencies and provide leadership for social change in their societies. The report which highlights the critical need for ramping up efforts to address capacity development for CSOs, will be released on July 14 at a virtual launch event.

Read the Report here
Click here to register to the event launching the Report

For further information or to request interviews with Forus staff and contributors to this report, please contact: Bibbi Abruzzini – Communication officer – bibbi@forus-international.org

About Forus
Forus, previously known as the International Forum of National NGO Platforms (IFP/FIP), is a member-led network of 69 National NGO Platforms and 7 Regional Coalitions from all continents representing over 22,000 NGOs active locally and internationally on development, human rights and environmental issues. http://forus-international.org

About the HLPF
The 2019 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) takes place on 7 – 16 July. This year, SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17 are under review; and 47 countries will submit their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). We are now four years into the 2030 Agenda but we know that governments reporting at the VNRs have provided very mixed pictures of progress. We are also aware that civil society involvement has also been patchy so far, despite an official commitment to engaging them fully in the review of progress. Forus will be organizing several events to strengthen these areas well as promoting a review of HLPF and its engagement mechanisms.

VNRs, Voluntary National Reviews - The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages member states to "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven". The voluntary national reviews are expected to serve as a basis for the regular reviews by the high-level political forum (HLPF), meeting under the auspices of ECOSOC. The national reviews aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/

SDG 17 - A transformative element of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is its focus on an inclusive “whole-of-society" approach to its implementation. Goal 17 of the agenda recognizes

the key role that multi-stakeholder partnerships involving governments, the private sector and civil society can play in the achievement of sustainable development.