

UN@75: Citizen action on the road to 2020
Workshop Report
27 August 2019
The 68th United Nations Civil Society Conference

Moderator

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Speakers

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Overview

The workshop was structured in three parts and consisted of presentations offered by the main speakers, three breakout group discussions and debriefing. The main goals of this workshop were: 1) to highlight the importance of the UN 75th anniversary and the opportunity it presents for civil society to compel UN Member States to recommit to the values of multilateralism and strengthen the UN system in partnership with civil society, 2) to inform the workshop participants about the objectives and activities of the UN 2020 initiative and Together First campaign, and present them with different options to join their advocacy efforts, and 3) to discuss how civil society, local communities, cities, and individuals can maximize influence and impact for the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the United Nations.

The majority of participants opted to join the UN2020 and Together First campaigns and brought different rich perspectives to the UN@75 conversation. Each breakout group discussed one question intended to seek new ideas on how the two campaigns should approach their objectives and activities for full impact in 2020.

Breakout group discussions

Question 1: How can we (the civil society) maximize influence and impact for the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the United Nations? What tools and activities planned for next year can be leveraged in this regard?

Participants emphasized the need to employ technology and social media to convey specific asks from civil society members for the UN@75. It was suggested to use the SDGs as a framework for challenging UN Member States to pursue an ambitious reform agenda in 2020. Similarly, the 75th anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter (on 26 June 2020) should be an opportunity to promote discussions and set up events in different cities around the world by partnering with Model UN and Rotary Clubs, and other similar organizations. It was noted that high schools and universities should be engaged in the discussions, and position papers should be prepared and submitted to the UN. In addition, those participating should also engage in dialogue on a more effective organization with UN and government officials. Making use of Article 109 of the UN Charter was further noted. Finally, it was agreed that a global NGO Forum on UN75 should be organized early next year to feed inputs to the Political Declaration to be finalized in June 2020.

Question 2: What financing mechanisms, existing networks, platforms, and partnerships can be leveraged to ensure that these efforts are meaningful and effective in shaping the political declaration and influencing the high-level meeting planned for September 2020?

Throughout the group discussion, it was clarified that UN 2020 and Together First are independent civil society coalitions that collaborate with the UN and its Member States. Their main objectives consist of mobilizing civil society to pressure states to recommit to the values of multilateralism (e.g. in light of countries pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement and the Human Rights Council) and to offer a set of reform proposals (that go beyond the UN Secretary-General's reform agenda) to strengthen and innovate the UN. The need to better define the word "multilateralism" and its significance by the two coalitions was raised among participants.

While taking note of the various anniversaries to be celebrated next year (e.g. 25 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on Gender Equality), it was suggested that the summit documents of the 2000 Millennium People's Assembly should be revisited. Questions were raised with regard to how organizations can participate and be involved in the UN@75 dialogues, and how can (and should) civil society deal with difficult (maybe more authoritarian) governments. It was noted that UN 2020 and Together First should have customizable (tailored to different audiences) letters that civil society and individuals can use to influence national political representatives. The need to activate youth and the private sector was emphasized, especially in relation to corporate social responsibility. Regarding financing, it was advised that the two campaigns use the networks of organizations such as Save the Children and International Rescue Committee to mobilize financial resources for the UN75 agenda. In addition, attention should be given to the global funds of the Global Partnership for Education and the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. It was proposed that the two coalitions should expand by partnering with the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs, the Conference of NGOs, and the Major Groups of NGOs.

Question 3: How can local communities (including cities) become part of UN 75? And how can UN 75 become local?

The discussion was centered around the need to make individuals better understand the work of the UN and its relevance to local communities. It was stressed that the UN should increase its partnerships with cities and local NGOs and enhance their outreach at the community level. To address the need to make people invested in this global project, it was suggested that more community consultations and local conferences should be organized and that these local discussions should be taken to the UN.

The lack of knowledge about the UN or the negative perceptions towards global institutions should be addressed through educational programs (civic programs in schools), examples about the UN's positive impact on individuals, and the difference between government and governance. It was stressed that the UN should find strategic local partners that know their communities and have them take ownership of the process. One recurrent theme emphasized the need to detach from the insular perception of the UN and increase civil society participation in a structured manner (e.g. voting through "My World" survey for the Sustainable Development Goals). One recommendation could be appointing a civil society representative charged to engage (through vertical and horizontal engagement) and listen to civil society in the UN@75 conversation.