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## Engaging “Our Common Agenda”

February 7, 2022  
Meeting Summary:

Civil Society Experts Dialogue linked to UN General Assembly thematic consultation #2:

### **“Accelerating the SDGs through sustainable financing and building trust”**

#### **Introduction**

From February 10 to March 8 2022, the UN General Assembly will hold five two-day informal consultations, to allow Member States and others to further consider the recommendations from the Secretary-General’s Our Common Agenda (OCA) report, and the means for their implementation.

To support the OCA process, the Coalition for the UN We Need (C4UN) is hosting a series of civil society Experts Dialogues linked to these five General Assembly meetings. On February 7 over three dozen civil society experts discussed the 12 OCA recommendations grouped in **Thematic Cluster #2, “Accelerating the SDGs through sustainable financing and building trust.”** (An updated breakdown of all the OCA recommendations as they have been grouped into five thematic clusters is [here.](#))

Participants at the meeting were asked to identify those OCA recommendations that should be prioritized, what’s missing in the report, and next steps. Ahead of the General Assembly meeting taking place February 14-15, this summary presents a condensed not-for-attribution overview of the comments and recommendations made at the February 7 meeting.

## General observations

The UNGA OCA Consultation's timing coincides roughly with the mid-point of Agenda 2030. This should give occasion to pause and evaluate progress. The **universality of Agenda 2030 should drive greater efforts toward implementation.**

As we consider the requirements of sustainable financing for development we need to also **consider the quality of the growth** we seek. The projections for recovery from COVID are for GDP growth, but these increases often do not translate to greater equality or more sustainability. **Inequalities are actually increasing.** The [World Inequality Report](#) reveals a stark imbalance in incomes between those at the top and those at the bottom. The poorest half of the world's population account for 8% of global income while the top 10% garner 52% of the income share.

There is a need to **address the large debt burdens** and debt service costs for many countries. Additionally, **eliminating illicit financial flows, tax havens**, and the need for **profound global tax reforms** are all part of the necessary changes that will lead to more sustainable development financing.

Many are calling for re-thinking and **reform of the Bretton Woods institutions** in this context.

The **Financing for Development (FfD) process is already mandated to address many of these challenges** (such as sovereign debt, illicit financial flows, tax reform) without looking at these issues in silos but as interconnected with other systemic issues on the FfD agenda

Global military spending has continued to rise even during the pandemic, inching towards \$2 trillion according to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. If states are serious about financing for development they could **make systematic cuts in military spending and divert that money** to creating better lives for all.

**Building trust is essential** as we craft the new social contracts. But globally (according to indices like the Edelman Trust Barometer) there is a decrease in trust of our institutions and political leaders, a trend that also applies in democracies. Effective use of **reliable data can build trust.** Non-state actors can contribute, but often aren't asked to do so.

Despite commitments in Agenda 2030 on responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making; access to information and fundamental freedoms; and

effective civil society partnerships, **civic space conditions around the globe remain highly challenging.**

Today's global challenges are enormous and need to be addressed urgently and concurrently. But too often multilateralism falls short in addressing the inequalities arising from **unequal power relations between the Global South and the Global North, within societies, and between women and men.**

The **current system of global governance** is a complex, multi-layered system of norms, institutions and treaties that should be mutually reinforcing, but **are frequently competing or conflicting.** For example, trade rules often contradict human rights and environmental standards. We **need a much more effective, coherent, democratic, and accountable multilateralism.**

Increasingly, corporations are presented by governments and multilateral institutions as indispensable partners in development. However, **realigning the business models to the imperatives of sustainable development will not come through voluntary approaches.** It requires a new set of **bold** public norms, policies, and investments. It requires the reaffirmation, rather than the abdication, of **the role of the State in defining a new set of global rules** that uphold the centrality of human rights.

**Social protection floors** will need to rely on adequate public information, tax reform, and finding ways to cope with debt.

**Further recommendations regarding the OCA paragraphs included in thematic cluster #2:**

### **Inclusive Multilateralism**

- There is a need for a much more effective, democratic, and accountable multilateralism. One that would create coherence between different multilateral frameworks, transform these, and reduce the power and dominance of wealthy countries and transnational corporations.
- There was concern that 'networked multilateralism' could further undermine the UN by bringing to the policy decision-making table governments, rights holders and corporate interests as 'equal stakeholders' thereby concealing the deeply ingrained asymmetries of power and voice between these actors. Advocates instead called for an 'inclusive multilateralism' that ensures intergovernmental negotiations on key global challenges are transparent and accessible to people who can then hold their respective governments accountable to ensure ambitious decisions.

- Current processes are bureaucratic and heavily state centric, often screening the UN from the everyday struggles and demands of those who are meant to benefit from these policies and programmes, including victims and those excluded from decision making. Mechanisms like a World Citizen's Initiative and a UN Parliamentary Assembly can bridge this gap and provide pathways to match the ambition of the OCA report with transformative actions.
- Combating corruption would help rebuild trust in public institutions and strengthen their integrity. The proposed International Anti-Corruption Court should be supported.

### **Reform of the international financial system**

- The urgent need for multilateral reforms includes the need to democratize decision-making at international institutions. Governments should adopt a global debt workout mechanism led by the UN, and establish an intergovernmental tax commission as well as a global technology assessment mechanism at the UN.
- Member States should focus on establishing a universal, intergovernmental UN tax body, negotiate a UN tax convention, and regulate businesses, including by engaging constructively in the ongoing development in the Human Rights Council of an international legally binding instrument on Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises. The UN Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters should be transformed into a global, inclusive norm-setting body for international tax cooperation.
- The proposal for a Biennial Summit is not required as the existing FfD process is already mandated to address urgent global systemic challenges of the international debt architecture and therefore should be strengthened rather than creating new, redundant mechanisms. Moreover, the FfD process already recognizes IFIs, in addition to WTO and UNCTAD, civil society and private sector as stakeholders for inputs while ensuring that negotiations are clearly intergovernmental with Member States as decision-makers.

### **Civil Society Engagement**

- Integrity of public information and investments in civic space go hand in hand. Enabled civic space where the media and civil society are able to freely verify public information is crucial. A plan of action to implement the UNSG's Call to Action for Human Rights as well as the UN guidance on protection and promotion of civic space should be considered.
- The work of the civil society focal points promoted by the Secretary-General could be better harmonized through the appointment of a Civil Society Envoy to drive the UN's outreach to civil society and ensure more consistent modalities for participation across UN agencies and offices.