Meeting Note - Bridging Regions, Building Power: Civil Society and the Future of the UN

Organised by C4UN and CIVICUS
18 and 25 November 2025

A. Background:

As part of the International Civil Society Week (ICSW), convened by CIVICUS, the online event, "*Bridging Regions, Building Power: Civil Society and the Future of the UN*", organised by Coalition for the UN We Need (C4UN) and CIVICUS sought to galvanize civil society action during the pivotal period following the adoption of the Pact for the Future in September 2024. Informed by the findings and recommendations in the Pact for the Future Annual Report and the Pact for the Future: Monitoring Report produced by the Information Clearinghouse of C4UN, the event aimed to translate global commitments into local action. The specific objectives were to,

- Enhance CSO awareness of Pact implementation and developments within the UN80 process as it relates to protecting global civic space and human rights, strengthening multilateralism and global governance.
- Empower civil society to engage in Pact implementation and UN80 reform by sharing information on UN official processes and upcoming consultations.
- Identify initial priorities to localise the Pact and demonstrate its relevance to ICSW 2025 session themes and country-specific issues.

B. Session 1: Setting the Stage – Civil Society and the Pact for the Future and UN80

With opening remarks from Adam Lupel, Executive Director of C4UN, the session a) provided a background on the Pact; b) updated on the implementation of the Pact; and c) presented an overview of the UN80 process.

Recognising that change is coming to the UN, Adam emphasised the participation of civil society will be a decisive factor in guiding the nature and result of the change - whether it leads to a better, more representative and revitalised UN, or a diminished and increasingly divided system of global governance. It is broadly recognised that the international institutions that facilitate collective decision-making on global common goods need to be fundamentally altered to meet the new context. With Member States preoccupied in managing the extreme financial situation facing the UN and seemingly ready to turn the page on the Pact, local and national civil society actors are increasingly showing leadership in Pact implementation. This reinforces the notion that, for the UN to meet its objectives of addressing global challenges more efficiently, effectively and equitably, civil society and local implementing partners hold the key.

Following opening remarks, the first part of the presentation served as a refresher on the key commitments made by Member States in the Pact in 2024. Drawing on the Pact for the Future Annual Report, an update on the implementation of specific action commitments was also provided. Covering the UN80 Initiative, its workstreams, reports and progress so far, the second part of the presentation provided an opportunity to take stock of the latest developments and upcoming opportunities to engage in UN80. (The PowerPoint and recording of the session are included in the Resources section at the end of this document.)

The presentations were accompanied with two Q&A segments where as many as 10 organisations intervened live and more engaged in the chat, indicating the interest and importance of the Pact and UN80 for grassroots organisations. The discussions focused on a wide range of topics from ensuring that the Early Warning for All Initiative is accessible for people with disabilities, to the next development agenda post-2030 and work of the UN on breast cancer awareness and screening. Recognising the shrinking space for civil society, participants reiterated the need to institutionalise civil society participation in the work of the UN at national and regional levels in addition to the global level and to support CSOs to hold Member States to account on their Pact commitments. The importance of engaging in the 2027 SDG Summit, where negotiations on the next development agenda post-2030 will start, and the 2028 review of Pact implementation were reiterated.

Against this backdrop and to facilitate inclusion of global majority (or global south) grassroots voices, C4UN will organise a series of Regional Futures Forum culminating in a Global Futures Forum on the margins of the HLPF in July 2026. An additional venue for civil society to engage are the ImPACT Coalitions formed during the 2024 UN Civil Society Conference in Nairobi; a website with more information on the ImPACT Coalitions is coming soon.

C. Session 2: From Global Commitments to Local Action

Building on Session 1, this second session focused on a) presenting the results of the Pact Monitoring Survey; b) cross-regional sharing of best-practices on Pact implementation; c) presenting the UN80 Dashboard developed by C4UN; and more importantly d) organising consultations to identify civil society priorities on the Pact and UN80.

1. **Initial priorities on Pact localisation:**

This segment of Session 2 was structured in two parts. First, six contributors from different regions and thematic chapters, whose inputs were collected through the survey "*Mapping Civil Society and Other Stakeholders Engaged in Monitoring the Advancement of the Pact for the Future*" and reflected in the report "*Pact for the Future: Monitoring Report – Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Pathways for Advancing Multilateral Commitments*", presented their work and perspectives on Pact implementation. This was followed by an open consultation, inviting participants from all regions to share their actions, additional priorities, challenges and recommendations for Pact localisation. The summary below outlines the contributions and interventions by chapter, following the structure of the Pact for the Future.

1.1. Chapter 1: Sustainable Development and Financing for Development

Contributors working on sustainable development noted that awareness of the Pact is growing, yet implementation remains uneven, as many actors are still unsure how to connect its commitments to their daily work. They described the monitoring work done by them on racial and gender justice and on people of African descent, assessing how Pact commitments are being translated into policies on inclusive governance, social protection, climate justice, financing for development and data. A central message was the need to institutionalise intersectionality so that policies to eradicate poverty, strengthen social protection, or mobilise finance address the combined effects of racism, sexism and other forms of oppression, especially for women and girls of African descent.

Contributors also underscored the importance of accountability systems with clear racial and gender equity benchmarks, supported by disaggregated data and community-led monitoring. They called for financing for development that prioritises grassroots and feminist organisations, as well as reparatory policies such as affirmative action, the recognition of territorial and cultural rights, and action against environmental racism. These measures were presented as core drivers of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals rather than as peripheral issues. From this perspective, priority actions include,

1. Placing reparatory justice and the fight against structural racism at the centre of national development strategies and budgets;
2. Strengthening universal and robust social protection and care systems through a racial and gender lens;
3. Ensuring that climate and environmental finance responds to environmental racism in marginalised communities;
4. Reducing debt and fiscal constraints that hinder support for grassroots actors;
5. Improving progressive and solidarity-based tax systems; and
6. Investing in data systems that make visible the realities of vulnerable groups.

Finally, contributors stressed that implementation must involve a redistribution of power, resources and decision-making, and that multilateralism must evolve beyond state-centric approaches to enable African-descent, feminist, youth and grassroots movements from the Global South to act as co-creators of global policy.

1.2. Chapter 2: International Peace and Security

Civil society actors working in conflict-affected contexts described the programmes they are carrying out to strengthen women's leadership, support local civil society organisations, promote community-led reconciliation and advocate for the implementation of national action plans for United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. Building on this, they also outlined the work they conduct to address hate speech, online and offline violence and technology facilitated

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1 C4UN and CIVICUS would like to thank the following organisations for offering their insights: Geledés-Black Woman Institute, Empathy for Life Integrated Development Association (ELiDA), Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC), Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Global Shield Policy, and Mobilizing an Earth Governance Alliance (MEGA).

gender-based violence, which they identified as increasingly central drivers of conflict dynamics. In presenting this work, contributors highlighted ongoing challenges linked to persistent violence, limited accountability for national and global commitments and a tendency for peace processes to treat women and youth as beneficiaries rather than as central actors in negotiation and dialogue processes. Against this backdrop, contributors identified several priority actions, including:

1. Placing women and youth at the centre of peace and reconciliation efforts;
2. Reinforcing tools to counter hate speech;
3. Strengthening early-warning mechanisms;
4. Protecting civilians in both digital and physical spaces; and
5. Enhancing local governance and social cohesion.

They concluded by recommending greater investment in women-led and community-rooted organisations, the mainstreaming of digital safety and the prevention of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, the expansion of measures to counter hate speech, stronger accountability for Women, Peace and Security commitments, increased political will and dedicated resources for implementation and meaningful participation and influence for conflict-affected communities.

1.3. Chapter 3: Science, Technology and Innovation and Digital Cooperation; and Annex I: Global Digital Compact

Contributors working on digital governance described a range of concrete actions they are undertaking to engage with national and regional processes connected to the Pact and the Global Digital Compact. Several contributors explained that they are organising multi-stakeholder consultations, providing orientations for parliamentarians, supporting ministries and regulatory bodies, contributing to national Internet Governance fora and strengthening the capacity of media professionals. One contributor also described launching the CSO Global Initiative, a multi-stakeholder Pact for the Future platform created after the Summit of the Future, through which they began advocating for the establishment of a national observatory to coordinate monitoring and implementation.

Contributors pointed to several challenges, including the need for stronger coordination among national actors, the strengthening of annual monitoring mechanisms and the full integration of the Global Digital Compact into national digital governance systems. Building on these reflections, they identified priority actions such as,

1. Reinforcing information integrity frameworks;
2. Advancing national implementation of the Global Digital Compact;
3. Addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence;
4. Ensuring that national digital governance effectively connects United Nations-level commitments with policy and regulatory systems on the ground: and
5. Greater engagement by UN Resident Coordinator offices and UN country teams in annual monitoring and review processes.

1.4. Chapter 4: Youth and Future Generations; and Annex II: Declaration on Future Generations

Youth-focused contributors explained that they are using regional youth convenings as an important entry point for Pact localisation, creating spaces where young people articulate national and regional priorities across the Pact's action areas. They described a large convening they organised, which brought together more than eighty young people from twenty-one countries to develop a call to action that now guides their advocacy in intergovernmental processes. In presenting this work, contributors also pointed to several challenges, including the difficulty of securing concrete engagement and support from United Nations entities despite public commitments to collaborate with youth, which limits efforts to align youth-led initiatives with the Pact's peace, security and development objectives. Building on these reflections, contributors identified priority actions such as,

1. Recognising young people in all their diversities as equal partners and leaders;
2. Supporting action-oriented commitments and investments on gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights;
3. Strengthening meaningful and sustained youth participation and intergenerational partnerships; and
4. Ensuring the involvement of young people in both the implementation and monitoring of the Pact.

1.5. Chapter 5: Transforming Global Governance

Contributors working on global governance noted that current multilateral structures are under unprecedented strain and remain ill-equipped to respond to cascading climate, environmental and systemic risks. They explained that they are taking action to strengthen COP processes by providing science-based briefings to decision makers, supporting the exploration of the Pact's proposed emergency platform for complex global shocks and convening dialogues on legal innovations, including discussions on options for international environmental adjudication. In outlining this work, contributors also observed that although the Pact preserves an opening to reinforce the UN system's response to global shocks, effective implementation will depend on coordinated action by member states, the mobilisation of adequate resources and meaningful engagement with civil society. They further stressed that environmental governance must become more integrated, science-driven and justice-centred, supported by institutional reforms that reflect planetary realities rather than outdated power structures. Building on these reflections, contributors identified several priority actions,

1. The need to develop multilateral and legal infrastructure capable of responding to planetary risks;
2. To finalise strong procedures under Action 54 to strengthen the international response to complex global shocks and to secure member state champions for implementation; and
3. To embed civil society participation across global governance reforms.

2. CSO priorities and/or recommendations on UN80:

- Prioritise genuine governance reform for macro-level transformation. Questions around governance reform are increasingly prominent among civil society organisations (CSOs), reflecting a growing recognition that meaningful change at the UN requires systemic transformation at the macro level. CSOs emphasised that UN80 presents a rare opportunity to address long-standing structural issues, modernise decision-making processes, and rebalance power dynamics within the system. By prioritising genuine governance reform, not just administrative adjustments in response to drastic budget cuts, the UN80 initiative can respond to global demands for a UN that is more representative, equitable, and capable of addressing today's complex challenges.

- Use targeted reforms to open dialogue and influence system change. While broad transformation is necessary, CSOs highlight that targeted reforms in specific parts of the UN system can serve as important entry points for progress. UN80 can be strategically used to open doors for deeper conversations with Member States on genuine reforms, enabling constructive dialogue on issues that have previously been difficult to advance. By demonstrating the value of practical, issue-specific improvements, the UN80 initiative can build political momentum and trust, laying the groundwork for more comprehensive, system-wide reform over time.

- Expand concrete and transparent channels for civil society engagement. A major challenge identified by CSOs is the lack of consistent, meaningful opportunities to engage with the UN80 initiative. There is a strong call for greater transparency, clearer communication, and more reliable avenues for participation that goes beyond symbolic consultation. Improving these channels would allow civil society to contribute substantively to shaping reforms, bring forward diverse expertise, and help ensure that the initiative remains accountable to those most affected by global policy decisions.

- Ensure reforms are grounded in lived realities of grassroots organisations. CSOs stress that for UN80 to succeed, it must be informed by the lived experiences and practical insights of grassroots organisations working directly with communities. These perspectives are essential for understanding how global policies translate into real-world impacts, both positive and harmful. Embedding grassroots knowledge into the design and implementation of all reforms will help ensure that proposals are relevant, equitable, and responsive to the needs of people on the ground, rather than shaped solely by high-level political considerations.

- Safeguard against reforms reinforcing inequalities within the UN system. Another key priority is establishing clear accountability mechanisms to ensure that UN80 reforms strengthen the system rather than deepen existing disparities. CSOs caution that without intentional safeguards, reforms could reinforce power imbalances between Member States, marginalised groups, or different stakeholders across the UN system. Strong accountability structures are therefore necessary to monitor outcomes, assess evidence-based impacts, and guarantee that the UN80 initiative advances delivery, justice, and inclusive global governance.

- Leverage the opportunity to improve implementation and mandate delivery. CSOs view the UN80 initiative as a significant opportunity to enhance the UN's performance at country level by ensuring that reforms translate into more effective delivery of mandates and commitments. Strengthening implementation requires not only improved institutional coherence but also better alignment between global frameworks and local realities. By addressing gaps between policy and practice, the UN80 initiative can help the UN achieve more tangible and measurable progress.

- Increase accessibility and strengthen partnerships with civil society. Finally, CSOs emphasise that reform must include making the UN more accessible and that building stronger partnerships with civil society are essential for effective programme delivery, long-term legitimacy, and rebuilding trust. This includes lowering barriers to participation, improving information-sharing, and creating mechanisms that allow CSOs to engage not just in consultation but in co-creation, implementation, and monitoring. By fostering deeper collaboration, Member States can leverage the expertise and reach of CSOs, enhancing innovation, and ensuring that the UN's work is grounded in the realities of the people it aims to serve.

Resources:

- Access the Pact Monitoring Survey here
- Recording of Session 1
- Slides for Session 1 and Session 2
- C4UN/ICH Pact Monitoring Report, September 2025
- C4UN Annual Pact Report
- C4UN UN80 Dashboard
- Session Concept Note

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