



Global consultation with civil society: Digital Roundtable,

UNDP's New Strategic Plan 2026-2029, November 19, 2024

This report highlights the key issues discussed by participants in the Global consultation with civil society: Digital Roundtable, UNDP's New Strategic Plan 2026-2029, emphasizing actions and opportunities for UNDP in the years ahead¹. Around 100 civil society representatives participated in the online consultations which was co-chaired between UNDP, represented by Susan Brown, Assistant Secretary General, Assistant Administrator and Director, Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy (BERA) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and civil society, represented by Oli Henman, Action for Sustainable Development, Major groups and other Stakeholders Coordination Mechanism Co-Chair, Co-Chair NGO MG. Panelists included Nudhara Yusuf: GGIN Executive Coordinator at Stimson Center, Co-Chair of the 2024 UN Civil Society Conference in Support of the Summit of the Future and Coalition for the UN We Need (C4UN); Jason Rosario Braganza, Executive Director at African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD) and Aditi Anand, National Coordinator of Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (WNTA).

The discussion centered around the three overarching guiding questions for the consultations, namely:

- CONTEXT: From your perspective, what are the top emerging issues that could have a major impact on people and planet, that we don't know enough about?
- WHAT WE DO: In your view, what are the most important long-term changes that UNDP should focus on?
- HOW WE WORK: How could we work better together to promote systems change?

Contributions from panelists and participants focused on a range of issues from enhancing civil society engagement, strengthening democratic processes, promoting inclusive growth, and addressing critical environmental and social challenges. The inputs from the consultation are summarized below under three overarching headings: Civil Society Partnerships, Operational Issues and Approaches, and Thematic Priorities. Each section is sub-divided into highlighted Context/Emerging Issues, proposed Action/Long-term Change, and identified Opportunities/Modalities

Together, these inputs provide valuable guidance for UNDP to drive impactful change both at the global and country levels towards the achievement of the SDGs under its next strategic plan.

¹The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of individual participants and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of UNDP.

1. Civil Society Partnerships:

Context/Emerging Issues: Civil society is a crucial partner in development, but there are mounting concerns about shrinking civic space and related obstacles faced by civil society actors. This repression, including limitations on funding and participation in decision-making processes, present significant barriers for civil society's ability to contribute to sustainable development.

Participants expressed concerns about a perceived shift where UNDP is working increasingly with governments only, and less with civil society at the country level. This has led to fewer opportunities for dialogue and collaboration at the country level which has damaged opportunities for partnership.

Action/Long-term Change: UNDP should:

- recognize civil society as a key partner in its strategic plan and outline specific ways in which civil society can be involved in its implementation.
- prioritize actions to counter shrinking civic space, and specifically implement the UN Guidance Note on Civic Space across its work.
- collaborate more with local NGOs and invite a broader selection on civil society representatives to participate in strategic dialogues at the country level.
- specifically collaborate with key local actors such as faith-based organizations, and ensure that marginalized communities such as migrant workers, the elderly, and youth are represented in policy dialogues and programmes.
- reinstate a global dialogue mechanism with civil society, by revisiting the Civil Society Advisory Board and/or by learning from other UN agencies who have such effective dialogue mechanisms.

Opportunities/Modalities: By supporting the formation of coalitions of civil society organizations (CSOs) working on similar SDGs or within shared geographic areas, UNDP can better address and amplify solutions towards root causes at the community level. Simultaneously, supporting civil society's participation in global multi-stakeholder processes will amplify their influence on global development agendas.

2. Operational Issues and Approaches:

2.a. UNDP and Multilateral Cooperation:

Context/Emerging Issues: There is an urgent need to move from policy to action, with a focus on implementing major initiatives like the Pact for the Future, the Declaration on Future Generations, and the Global Digital Compact.

Action/Long-term Change: UNDP should:

- support the move from policy to implementation through supporting the implementation of these key initiatives by fostering collaboration within the UN Family, including with Regional Commissions, and through engaging in partnerships beyond the multilateral system.

- seek to contribute to concrete action-plans for the implementation of global policies and treaties, ensuring that commitments are translated into measurable outcomes.
- support processes that seek to eliminate duplication of roles across UN entities and external partners to streamline efforts, enhance efficiency, and increase impact.

Opportunity/Modalities: UNDP's ability to catalyzing these initiatives and collaborating in and beyond the UN Development Group is critical for real impact. UNDP can leverage its position within the multilateral system to streamline efforts, remove duplication between UN entities, and strengthen genuine multi-stakeholder partnerships for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

2.b. UNDP and Local-Level Engagement:

Context/Emerging Issues: There is an increasing recognition that development must be driven by grassroots organizations that are directly connected to local communities. Working from the ground up to ensure that local needs are addressed will lead to more sustainable and inclusive outcomes.

Action/Long-term Change: UNDP should:

- re-focus its work towards increased locally centered interventions and increased collaboration with grassroots actors, organizations, and local movements to develop sustainable solutions that are driven by local communities.
- should strengthen local partnerships with civil society actors and actively engage them in decision-making processes at the country level.

Opportunities/Modalities: By applying a genuine localized, bottom-up, analysis and by strengthening and broadening its partnerships with grassroots organizations, UNDP can contribute to a more inclusive development that reflects local priorities, thereby enhancing the sustainability and impact of its programs.

2.c. Re-defining key concepts: Development and Leaving No One Behind (LNOB):

Context/Emerging Issues: The concept of "development" is in transition, and it is vital to anchor plans and actions in a comprehensive framework that reflects modern complexities and aligns with sustainable development goals, through an inclusive approach. Marginalized and grassroots communities are often excluded from policy discussions, decision-making processes, and access to opportunities. There is a need for accurate data to reflect the challenges faced by these groups, which is essential for effective development planning and implementation.

Action/Long-term Change: UNDP should

- redefine "development" at the core of its new Strategic Plan, to encompass new knowledge and interconnected issues such as poverty, inequality, gender, health, nature, and pollution.
- clearly define and operationalize the LNOB principle, ensuring that marginalized communities are prioritized in its programs and strategies. In this way, LNOB is not only a goal, but an engine to drive inclusive sustainable development.

- support initiatives and processes aimed at obtaining and utilizing accurate, grassroots-level data to more effectively represent the challenges faced by marginalized communities, ensuring their needs are adequately represented in development plans.
- prioritize work on systemic inequities and advocate for access to decision-making spaces for marginalized groups.
- should redefine "development" at the core of its new Strategic Plan, to encompass new knowledge and interconnected issues such as poverty, inequality, gender, health, nature, and pollution. This should involve creating a comprehensive framework that reflects modern complexities and aligns with sustainable development goals.

Opportunities/Modalities: As the UN's lead development agency, UNDP has a unique opportunity and mandate to lead discussions around key thematic issues, serving as a primary convener to create spaces for marginalized communities to actively participate in policy-developments and decision-making, to challenge systemic hierarchies and drive inclusive change.

2.d. UNDP Funding Model, Accountability, reporting and Leadership:

Context/Emerging Issues: Development funding is not responding to people's needs but to political priorities and pressure. Despite efforts for accountability, transparency, and reporting, these are still found to be flawed, undermining trust in the multilateral system at large. Equally, despite efforts made on diversity, equity and inclusion, there is still a perceived need to further improve in this area.

Action/Long-term Change: UNDP should:

- reorient its funding model to prioritize community needs over political demands, ensuring that resources are directed where they are most needed.
- simultaneously strengthen internal accountability systems and increase its transparency, ensuring that commitments are met and that funds are used effectively.
- focus reporting on tangible impact, ensuring that results are based on actual outcomes rather than on data selected to attract funding.
- address racial diversity in its leadership and staff.

Opportunities/Modalities: UNDP can, through its central role, lead by example, build trust with stakeholders, and demonstrate the impact of its programs on the ground for a more inclusive, responsive, and transparent development financing model. By promoting diversity, UNDP will be better equipped to reflect the global community it serves, fostering more inclusive and effective solutions.

3: Thematic priorities

3.a. Environmental and Climate Action:

Context/Emerging Issues: The issue of climate change needs to be addressed through multiple pathways such as equitable energy transitions, ocean-based climate action, and through ensuring food and water security, particularly in vulnerable regions.

Action/Long-term Change: UNDP should

- focus more on local-level actions that empower communities to adopt climate-smart practices, such as training in resilient crops, climate adaptation technologies, and sustainable water management.
- prioritize water management and sustainable agriculture to ensure food and water security, particularly in vulnerable regions.
- strengthen health systems to ensure resilience against climate impacts in vulnerable regions.

Opportunities/Modalities: UNDP can play an instrumental role in supporting partnerships between grassroots organizations and international stakeholders, thereby amplifying the impact of climate action efforts. Additionally, UNDP can play a key role in enforcing global climate treaties and advancing international sustainability goals.

3.b. Governance:

Context/Emerging Issues: To fully realize good governance, an essential fundament for sustainable development, citizens must be empowered and able to better hold governments accountable.

Action/Long-term Change: UNDP should:

- seek to strengthen citizen participation by promoting robust civic education and participatory processes and modalities such as town hall meetings and other interactive forums where citizens, especially youth, can engage directly with government leaders.
- develop a framework to engage young people in electoral processes and support campaigns to encourage youth voter registration.
- further support the development of independent media outlets and strategies to counter state-led propaganda that undermines democracy, governance, and sustainability, and promotes division.

Opportunities/Modalities: By realizing the importance of youth engagement, and concretely supporting youth actors in its work on governance, UNDP can contribute to more transparent, accountable, inclusive political systems in the future.

3.c: Youth Engagement and Leadership:

Context/Emerging Issues: Young people are often overlooked despite their significant potential to drive change. It is crucial to engage them in governance and leadership roles to ensure that future generations are prepared to take on leadership responsibilities.

Action/Long-term Change: UNDP should:

- develop focused frameworks that engage young people in policymaking and leadership roles. This can include mentorship programs and digital platforms for youth to share ideas, monitor governance, and ensure their participation in decision-making at all levels.
- actively promote the engagement of youth and women in macroeconomic policy, ensuring that their perspectives shape economic systems that will impact future generations.

- implement programs and actions that seek to create green and decent jobs for youth, particularly in the Global South, that align with sustainable development goals.

Opportunities/Modalities: By prioritizing youth leadership and empowering them partake in dialogues that shape governance and economic systems, UNDP can contribute to foster innovation, diversity, and sustainable governance.

3.d: Sustainable Financing for Development:

Context/Emerging Issues: Financing for development needs to be increasingly integrated with broader discussions on economic transformation, ensuring that social, economic, and humanitarian concerns are addressed. Public participation and the role of civil society must be central in these discussions.

Action/Long-term Change: UNDP should:

- recalibrate its work on financing to focus more on strengthening domestic resource mobilization rather than primarily attracting private capital.
- continue and strengthen initiatives that address key global economic governance issues such as illicit financial flows and debt burdens.
- strategically support civil society participation, and utilize their insight and expertise, in related dialogues at all levels.

Opportunities/Modalities: UNDP can leverage its role in promoting national-to-global conversations, supporting policies that increase access to finance for sustainable development, to help unlock the resources needed to achieve the SDGs.