

EU partnership Forum, 2017

The 2017 EU Partnership Forum gathered nearly 500 people from over 60 countries, allowing for very diverse and enriching perspectives. Nearly 25% came from outside of Europe. All the European Institutions were well represented, as well as several EU Member States (MS). In a quick survey during the opening ceremony, 16% said they were implementers of development or public policy, 31% were actors of governance and advocacy, and 53% said both. The participants included different types of civil society organizations (CSO) and local authorities (LA) and their networks, and public officials. The 28 Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) signatories were present with several members.

The ***EU Consensus on Development***, adopted last month was a critical thread of the Forum. This policy defines the implementation of the **Agenda 2030** and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for the EU's development cooperation. Key aims were to explore the implementation of the *Consensus* and to strengthen and deepen the EU's Partnerships worldwide with CSO and LA. The *Consensus* recognises CSO and LA as key players and partners of the EU, and promises "to deepen our partnerships... through dialog and support, and ... more innovative forms of engagement", so they can play their full role as actors of governance, advocates and implementers. The many CSO and LA who contributed to the formulation of the *Consensus* were thanked, and all were encouraged to join in its implementation.

With a recognition of the difficulties, crises and enormous challenges facing the SDG, the importance of meeting to discuss and find concrete ways of engagement was emphasised by the EC's Rosário Bento Pais, Klaus Rudischhauser, and Commissioner Neven Mimica, as the EC seeks "new and better ways to engage with you" and works to include all partners. "Our strategy is to value CSO-LA in our work, we need you for implementation. To discuss and shape policies, and enact governance". Jüri Seilenthal for the Estonian presidency said the SDG require better, more innovative collaboration. "The wealth of experience and expertise in this room is amazing, we need to capitalise on it", he said.

The Forum addressed crucial thematic and geographic areas where the partnerships are needed more than ever, addressing evolving challenges of the field. There were 3 interwoven threads: **1) Building momentum**: The 13 sessions discussed key issues such as means of implementation, shrinking space, and fulfilling the New Deal in Fragile States and resilience, among others. **2) Building multi-actor synergies**: Gathered in 4 geographical areas to plan and build, participants prepared for upcoming summits (AU-EU, ASEM, EU-CELAC) or discussed forging policy dialogs (Neighbourhood South and Middle East). **3) Building Initiatives**: Addressed relevant EC financial tools and mechanisms (to inform on the approach to resilience, EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, EU rules for re-granting, and France's funding for CSO) and consulted participants on the 2018-20 CSO and LA programmes, DEAR, EIDHR, programmes, and EU External Investment plan.

In all sessions, each actor illustrated their important and unique role in implementing the Agenda 2030, reviewing key responsibilities and seeking ways to respond to challenging local environments, to be effective, empower and find concrete win-win solutions. Olga Montufar Conteras recognized the EC's work, (Indigenous Persons with disabilities Global Network, IPDGN) stating: "It's very interesting to work with the EU because it makes specific references to Indigenous People with disability. Today there is justice: we are here and we are recognized". "We can contribute to society", but we "need a holistic approach". However, more effort is still needed to find ways to increase the inclusivity of partnerships and actively include the variety of CSO and LA in dialog and decision-making (especially those who have been less visible). Commissioner Mimica said: "The SDG can only work involving those on the front line, ...so you have my cast iron commitment that you will remain at the front of our attention." The role of women was emphasised as well as great challenges that remain. We were reminded to always consider if there is a gender element to any issue, and the EU prioritisation of gender in funding. Karla Quintana, Judge of the Supreme Court of Mexico, spoke passionately about how "The lack of representation of women in public life has direct consequences on the implementation of public policies". There were also calls to increase the focus on the role of youth. Most sessions had comments about including

capacity development, and addressing the needs of local actors and smaller organisations. Ziad Samad (Arab NGO Network for Development) said: “To enhance synergies, the objective is to bring the global issues to the regional context, and bring experience from other regions”, including other stakeholders and actors. Some talked of initial steps in local and regional structural dialogs that have led to mobilisation and action. There were calls for more multi-stakeholder opportunities, and cross-sectoral collaborations in the future, and that Structured Dialogs should be multiplied and reinforced.

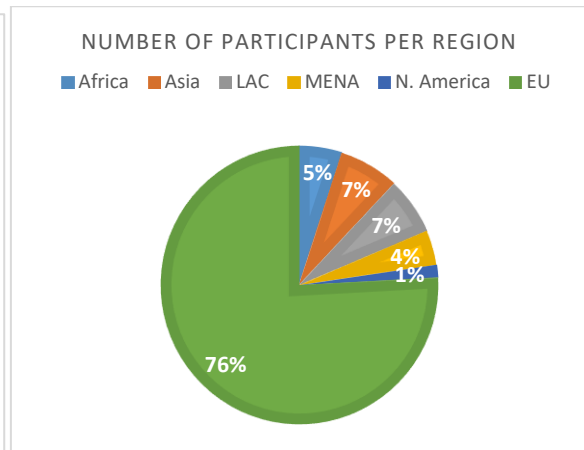
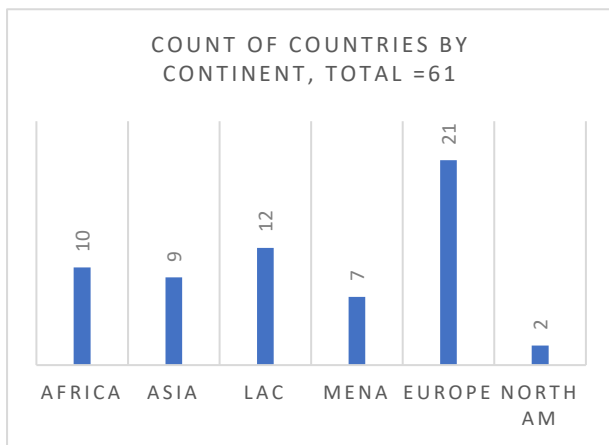
The Enabling Environment (EE) for CSO and LA to fully play their role is an ongoing concern, and included in key EU commitments. It is still an issue of strong interest and was mentioned in many sessions. There are major challenges of shrinking space for CSO, in both obvious and subtle ways. In the plenary survey, in qualifying the current conditions of their working environment, Forum participants were almost evenly divided: 15% find it repressive and 31% find it worsening, 25% say it is improving and 29% find it conducive. This adds to a global context of the effects of security pressures and the reduction of funds from other donors. The EU has taken great strides to address the EE, shrinking space and support for Human Right defenders, but still more effort is needed. Commissioner Mimica said the shrinking space for EE for CSO is “counter to all the commitments we as EU have and need to make”, and promised: “We will do all we can to protect and ensure the space, support and security you need to do your job, and to ensure we do ours better.” Seilenthal emphasized the Council and Member States continued concern about shrinking space and commitment to EE, and the needed support to capacity building of CSO – LA at all stages (policy, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and accountability). The EU and key leaders were challenged to engage governments and ensure their support and cooperation with CSO and LA. Stavros Lambrinidis, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights said, “Governments coordinating with CSO, is not a Western issue, or Eastern, or North or South, it is a world one” and “working with CSO brings about stability and openness”. Real participation and democracy require support, capacity building and funding, partnerships, voice, information, technology, regulatory frameworks, independent institutions for verification and recourse, as was often emphasised.

The role of CSO and LA as watch-dogs and actors of governance and accountability were throughout the Forum. It was recognised that much more work is needed for effective accountability and monitoring of EU, global and national commitments. SDG 17 was emphasised. We were reminded of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, where CSO-LA can also play a role. In many sessions, there were calls for more complete monitoring, especially to hold governments accountable. This is possible and needed, even for difficult and multi-faceted issues such as Trade, negotiating Peace and building healthy institutions: “It is positive to have a monitoring mechanism allowing citizen representatives to discuss with institutions” (Georgios Altintzis, ITUC). All actors must be at the table to monitor and hold accountable, including local communities and women (Rita Lopidia Martin, EVE Organisation for Women in Development in South Sudan). Guy Aho Tete, (REPAOC) said that the role of CSO is to “support the public sector, amplify our voice, accompany the authorities, not as enemies, but proposing alternatives”. This requires “new definitions of our role and support of global platforms”. “There is an external view there has been improvement, but there are still great challenges. The SDGs should include a monitoring tool, and us, as a society we need to provide information. We are sometimes reluctant to provide information because we are scared” (Olga Montufar Conteras, IPDGN). Sally Nicholson (WWF) called on the EU to strengthen the monitoring of the SDG and of the Consensus and called on the EU to renew transparent comprehensive reports on its financing for development.

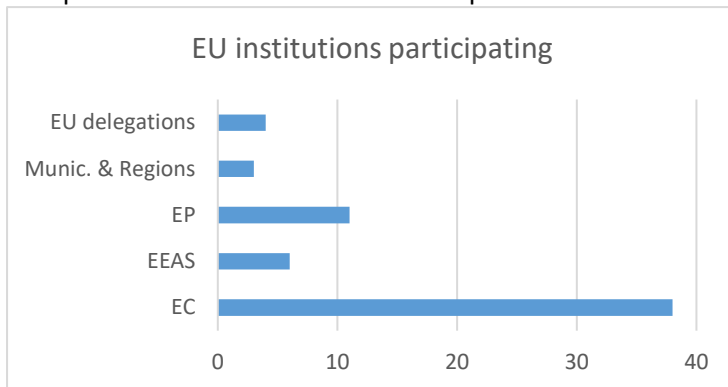
Many of you were actively involved in the preparation of this event. Thank you for making it a success.

Key Figures:

About the participants:



European Institutions in the Partnership Forum:



Quick Survey during Opening Plenary:

- 44% can see in the field that the **EU is the world's leading donor**, 47% said the EU is still building its momentum 9% could not see it.
- **Fostering resilience** is a new EU approach, 33% do it already, but 60% feel that CSO and LA are not yet enough at the centre of the approach.
- **The interaction between CSO and LA** 68% say that at the local level as essential 25% feel mutual trust is starting to be built, only 7% feel they are incompatible actors.
- **Collaborating with the Private Sector** 22% said they already work together, 16% are ready to do so, but 62% say they have not yet overcome this divide
- The current conditions of **Enabling Environment** in the work context 15% it is repressive 31% it is worsening 25% it is improving 29% it is conducive