



2020

**COMMON MINIMUM
STANDARDS FOR
MULTI-STAKEHOLDER
ENGAGEMENT
IN THE UN
DEVELOPMENT
ASSISTANCE FRAMEWORK**



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FOREWORD

“We the Peoples” are the celebrated opening words of the UN Charter. It is “We the Peoples” who are embarking today on the road to 2030. Our journey will involve Governments as well as Parliaments, the UN system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, the scientific and academic community – and all people. Millions have already engaged with, and will own, this Agenda. It is an Agenda of the people, by the people, and for the people – and this, we believe, will ensure its success.”

(Paragraph 52 of the 2030 Agenda)

I. INTRODUCTION

These Common Minimum Standards for multi-stakeholder engagement support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at country level through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) as the most important instrument for the planning and implementation of United Nations development activities in each country, in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Common Minimum Standards build on good field practices shared by UNCTs and will serve as minimum level steps UN Country Teams (UNCTs) will take to forge stakeholder engagement in support of the 2030 Agenda through UNDAFs, while recognizing that country contexts are different and that the implementation will differ based on national considerations. UNCTs are encouraged to go beyond the Common Minimum Standards. The standards should be read alongside the upcoming redesigned UNDAF Guidance and the Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) Guide.

These Common Minimum Standards reflect the UN system's universal commitment to the ideals of free, active and meaningful participation embodied, among other things, in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the UN Common Understanding of a Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation (2003). It is understood, however, that they will need to be applied with due consideration to the principle of national ownership and further articulated at country level in order to reflect varying national contexts.

These standards build on the work that UNCTs are already doing, recognizing that UNCTs have been pursuing engagement with stakeholders in different ways and to differing degrees. The Common Minimum Standards are an enabling tool for UNCTs to strengthen programming at the country level under the principle of national ownership and a tool to help building trust between the UN and diverse stakeholders. While UNCTs should foster stakeholder engagement in the UNDAF process, it is recognized that UNDAFs are prepared and finalized in full consultation and agreement with national Governments.

Critical factors underscoring the need for Common Minimum Standards include:

- People have a fundamental and inalienable human right to participate in public affairs at every level, including community, local, national, regional and international.
- Adequate civic space is a necessary condition for meaningful multi-stakeholder engagement. However, in recent years, civic space has been shrinking worldwide with significant implications for the UN's ability to protect people's rights, promote sustainable development, deliver humanitarian services, address discrimination and support peace efforts. Concerted efforts to reverse this trend are therefore required. The UN has a role in enabling civic space both to ensure stakeholder engagement and participation in its operations, and to promote and protect civic space in its advocacy with national governments. The UN Executive Committee has stated that the protection of civic space should be integrated in all UN processes, including the development of a mapping of existing practices on protecting and expanding civic space across the UN that informs the development system reform streams.
- There is also a need to better leverage increased technological connectivity for participatory approaches, for feedback loops to obtain real-time information on the impact and efficacy of UN programmes and initiatives.
- There is a need to ensure participation of stakeholders during all stages of the UNDAF, including through feedback in the design, implementation monitoring and evaluation stages. This feedback will make the needs assessment, data gathering and monitoring mechanisms stronger, more responsive and ultimately more effective.
- "Crowdsourcing" of ideas and other ways of tapping into collective intelligence should be utilized as important accountability mechanisms. They are consistent with the tenets of the SDGs and improve the legitimacy of the UN's work.
- The UN needs to be more transparent and accountable as well as deliver on what partners need to achieve the SDGs by 2030. The SDGs will not be achieved without building coalitions and people-centred partnerships.

Understanding that no one size fits all, there is a need for differentiated implementation of these Common Minimum Standards according to country contexts and in line with national ownership.

II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The overarching principle of the Common Minimum Standards for Multi-stakeholder Engagement is that the voice of stakeholders at country level should inform all stages of the UNDAF processes.

Below are the guiding principles of engagement that can promote inclusivity and enhanced engagement for the 2030 Agenda.

1



CIVIC SPACE, INCLUSIVITY, DIVERSITY AND REPRESENTATION

- UNCTs have a key role to play in supporting Member States in implementing the commitment of inclusive and transparent participation of all stakeholders in the 2030 Agenda and in facilitating inclusive, safe and enabling environments where stakeholders can contribute.
- UNCTs should take appropriate steps to promote and protect civic spaces based on the full recognition of the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly, as well as the right to participation.
- UNCTs should address the barriers that prevent specific population groups from meaningfully engaging in development processes, with a focus on groups that are most affected by inequalities and discrimination.
- UNCTs should ensure fair and representative participation of various constituents of society, paying special attention to women, children, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, ethnic, national, linguistic and racial minorities, refugees, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, migrants and indigenous people, among others. UNCTs should seek to engage people in remote (peri-urban, rural) areas and work with stakeholder that are marginalized and underrepresented.

2



TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- UNCTs should demonstrate accountability to stakeholders and create ongoing feedback loops to help determine the effectiveness of our interventions, including developing accountability tools for situations restricting access to information.
- UNCTs should also demonstrate transparency regarding activities, inputs and results.

3



ACCESSIBILITY AND SAFETY

- UNCT should take special measures to ensure that all stakeholders can access information and facilities, including people with disabilities and those with limited resources or access to technology.
- UNCTs should find effective solutions towards the inclusion and safety of persons seeking to engage, including online, particularly in contexts of shrinking civic space or when stakeholder's well-being is threatened or at risk.

4



RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND SUSTAINABILITY

- Stakeholders engaged with the UN should demonstrate a fundamental respect for human rights, democracy and rule of law, and be aligned with our core mission, values, the sustainable development framework and the 2030 Agenda.
- Engagement between UNCTs and stakeholders should be based on respect for freedom of expression, freedom of association as well as the right to peaceful assembly, and participation.
- Engagement should follow the principle of "Leaving No One Behind."

III. COMMON MINIMUM STANDARDS

These Common Minimum Standards apply to UN Country Teams across all stages of the UNDAF: design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This also includes the Common Country Analysis (CCA). The Common Minimum Standards provide a roadmap for meaningful, inclusive and diverse multi-stakeholder engagement, with the goal of fostering enhanced partnerships for the 2030 Agenda. The universal nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its promise to leave no one behind, requires that the UN should address the needs and priorities of all country contexts while at the same time adapting and diversifying its approach according to specific country needs. This applies to all the stages of the UNDAF. UNCTS are encouraged to build on existing mechanisms in order to meet the Common Minimum standards.



STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

1. Building on existing mechanisms of stakeholder consultation, and drawing upon other UN reforms processes underway, including the development of the new UNDAF and LNOB Guidelines, UNCTs should aim to develop and maintain a database of relevant stakeholders that adhere to the principles of inclusive participation intended in the SDG agenda. The stakeholder mapping should consider national realities while seeking to be as inclusive as possible. The stakeholder list should include at least the groups outlined below (see additional details in Annex II):
 - a. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) – including human rights defenders (as called for in SDG 16.10)
 - b. Local governments
 - c. Parliamentarians
 - d. Workers' Organizations
 - e. Business and Employers' Membership Organizations
 - f. Research Organizations and Academia
 - g. Other groups as per national contexts
2. Those UNCTs which develop a database should create a step-by-step plan for stakeholder engagement including by brainstorming on possible barriers to participation and how to overcome them. UNCT members should collaborate with each other in developing the database and inform their respective stakeholders about the database and share their stakeholder lists. Stakeholders should be informed that they are in the database, and the utmost care and consideration should be taken when collecting and protecting data on stakeholders for the database. The UNCT can adjust the database at any time. Organizations can request to be added to or deleted from the database at any time. Inclusion criteria for stakeholders should be transparent, equitable and gender-sensitive. UNCTs should ensure that engaged stakeholders respect the UN Charter and the principles of the 2030 Agenda before adding them to the database. Additional mechanisms should be considered to dissemination of information beyond the database, including through umbrella organizations, media and other approaches. UNCTs should update and diversify the database regularly as possible and consult with and seek advice from concerned stake holders in order to guide the data base updating process.

3. In countries where the development of a database is not possible UNCTs should develop a basic mapping of stakeholders and progressively move to a formal database, when context allows.

WIDE OUTREACH

1. The UNCT should, as much as possible, reach out to all stakeholders in the database at the very beginning of the programme stage, inform about the process and opportunities for participation and formally ask for their inputs.
 - In the case of in-person convenings, when ever possible, online participation methods and access should be made available to provide an alternate avenue of access for willing participants who cannot be physically present due to distance, lack of resources, disability, safety, etc. In cases where technological access is limited, UNCTs are encouraged to leverage their relationships with partner organizations or consult with stakeholders as to alternate offline options for participation.
 - All consultative meetings should be announced online. Appropriate time for stakeholder consultation should be considered at UNDAF planning. Minutes of the meetings should be circulated to the database of stakeholders.
 - In the case of remote participation and online data collection, the use of innovative techniques to ensure qualitative and inclusive inputs should be ensured by the UNCT.
 - Arrangements should be made to allow for inputs online. However, additional methods, such as inputs via SMS, email, mail, phone, or in-person consultations are highly encouraged, to the extent budget and safety allows for it. Special consideration should be given to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities.
2. After the initial round of inputs, the UNCT should make an additional attempt to reach out to particularly marginalized, discriminated and/or underrepresented stakeholders. The recommendations made by UN human rights mechanisms can prove useful to identify marginalized and discriminated against groups for whom extra efforts should be made by UNCT to reach out to, with a view to leaving no one behind.

3. Other ways of reaching out to stakeholders should also be ensured in case of no-response and more innovative methods should be employed in advance to reach out to remote communities as cited above. In addition, UNCT could develop joint strategies to further outreach to different civil society actors at the local and grass-root level and facilitate networking.
4. It is encouraged that stakeholders be consulted during the data collection phase of the CCA creation process as outlined in the CCA framework document, and consulted once again, after the CCA is completed to ensure that their needs and concerns are addressed. Feedback can be provided in person, online or through other contextually appropriate methods as determined by the UNCT. The CCA once completed should be circulated among stakeholders to the widest extent possible.
5. UNDAF priorities should be discussed with and thoroughly explained to stakeholders. A final version of the UNDAF should be discussed during a meeting with the stakeholders to discuss inputs and align on expectations on the part of both the UNCTs and the stakeholders. UNCT should also be particularly mindful to avoid overly technical jargon which undermines the ability of people to understand what the UN intends to do.

TARGETED OUTREACH

1. While wide outreach is useful for gathering overall inputs, there should also be targeted approaches whenever expert engagement is needed. UNCTs are encouraged to identify country-specific and tailored approaches to engage different sectors for contribution on diverse stakeholder roles, including on knowledge exchange, situation analysis, policy and programming, monitoring and evaluation, service delivery, among others, as appropriate.
2. UNCTs may consider convening a Multi-stakeholder Consultative Forum (MCF) with representation from all relevant stakeholder groups to ensure inclusivity. The goal of the MCF is to create sustained, periodic and close cooperation. The MCF will allow for more targeted dialogue on challenging issues, and it allows the UNCT to discuss sensitive challenges that cannot otherwise be discussed in mass outreach. In order to maintain the balance between targeted dialogue and representation, it is imperative that the stakeholder participants are fully representative of the wider population of stakeholders.
3. UNCT members can recommend stakeholders for the MCF, but UNCTs should ensure participation of various

constituents, including women, children, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, ethnic, national, linguistic and racial minorities, refugees, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, migrants and indigenous people. Stakeholders for the consultation forum are chosen to represent the interests of their constituents at large, not their personal capacity.

- Representatives of parliamentarians should both include the opposition and the majority in the government.
- Representatives of workers' and employers' organisations should be recommended by the International Labour Organization.
- Representatives of CSOs, representatives of local government and representatives of research organizations and academia shall be chosen based on UNCT member recommendations.

Where appropriate, UNCTs could promote self-organizing processes where groups and constituencies select their representatives to participate at the MCF.

4. The purpose of the MCF is to ensure regular engagement with stakeholders, as a complement to mass outreach. At a minimum, the MCF should be convened with the Resident Coordinator (RC) at least once a year, but more frequent dialogue is encouraged. All UNCT members should be invited. The calendar of meetings should be shared as early as possible to facilitate planning and preparatory work from representatives. An agenda should be circulated in advance, and minutes should be shared after the meeting.
5. The safety of the members of the MCF should be a priority. If a certain stakeholder is at safety risk, for example by simply attending a meeting, the UNCT can add bilateral communication options or take any other suitable measure to ensure safe participation for that stakeholder.
6. UNCTs should follow up on the MCF either online, in person or on a consultative platform within 2-3 weeks to allow stakeholders to provide additional feedback on UNDAF design for programming. By engaging with stakeholders regularly and often regarding programming that directly affects them, not only is trust built, but programming can better respond to realities on the ground.

2



IMPLEMENTATION/ CO-CREATION

1. UNCTs should share information and reach out to stakeholders periodically in a manner best for the country context with updates on the UN's work and with opportunities for engagement. UNCTs should aim to build on lessons learnt from the design phase in terms of outreach and use innovative methods not only for outreach but for all phases of the UNDAF. The UNCTs should also include opportunities for stakeholders to take part in creating and shaping sustainable development solutions that directly impact them.
2. UNCTs should engage partners in strategic advisory roles, as well as implementing partners. UNCTs should create space for them to contribute to the implementation of programmes in a meaningful, transparent way that encourages other stakeholders to contribute to the UNCTs work and seek partner engagements in the provision of strategic advice & positioning.
3. The UNCT should convene the MCF annually to discuss progress on implementation of the UNDAF. The UNCT may meet individually with some stakeholders if there are cultural sensitivities or safety concerns that prevent them from participating in consultation fora.
4. The MCF should be closely connected to the Joint National/UN Steering Committee. It is recommended that – to the extent possible – representatives of the MCF are members of the Joint National/UN Steering Committee, thereby promoting the active involvement of stakeholders.
5. Where appropriate, UNCTs should support capacity building of stakeholders' ability to engage with the UNDAFs.
6. UNCTs should make available a short summary of stakeholder engagement, on an annual basis. The summaries will serve as a progress tracker.

3



MONITORING

The actions taken during the monitoring phase will be different based on national contexts and responding to complex challenges in different countries.

1. UNCTs should consult with stakeholders on programming results on a regular basis and optimize their outreach using new technologies. Moreover, feedback mechanisms should be accessible to persons with disabilities and presented in a language that stakeholders can understand and respond to.
2. This should be complemented with in-person consultations and constructive dialogue where appropriate and possible. UNCTs should consider results from stakeholders' inputs when adjusting programmes and setting new strategies.
3. UNCTs should give clear time parameters and deadlines for feedback so that stakeholders clearly understand what and when they are being asked to provide feedback.
4. UNCTs should utilize qualitative analytics, such as perception surveys to gauge how programmes are being implemented.
5. UNCTs should reach out to stakeholders and encourage their feedback not only on the monitoring of progress, but on the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement processes
6. UNCTs should use social media platforms regularly as a means of generating and encouraging democratic participation and sharing information about UNCTs' work. Social media, when appropriate depending on context/situation, can also be used to receive real-time feedback on the effectiveness of UNCT programmes. Moreover, social media can be used to identify yet-unknown influencers in the development policy space as well as learn about burgeoning grassroots, innovative solutions to development challenges that can be potentially be scaled up.

4



EVALUATION

1. During the annual MCF, UNCTs should organize online and offline debate or roundtable consultations when evaluating the efficacy of programmes to give stakeholders the opportunity to provide key inputs. In these fora, the consultation should focus more on stakeholder discussion and feedback, rather than presentation of the work already done by UNCTs.
2. Constructive criticism of UNCT programming and processes should be highly encouraged and used as a tool to improve programming and outreach.
3. It should be made apparent to stakeholders in subsequent iterations of programmes that their feedback was incorporated and that their inputs are influential in UN policy. Special care should be taken to incorporate the inputs of the most marginalized groups who are often left out of policy creation. The Common Minimum Standards offer an opportunity to address inequities in participation in policy development and the implementation of these Common Minimum Standards can support strengthening inclusive policy development models at national level.
4. Stakeholder input from the consultations should be synthesized and distributed to stakeholder networks. The input from stakeholders where appropriate should be included and then redistributed to stakeholders to demonstrate that their inputs have been useful and transformative. It is important to translate key inputs and findings into non-technical jargon that is understandable to everyone, including the most marginalized. The findings and information about the UN's inclusive approach to programme development should be shared.
5. The multi-stakeholder consultations should be a space to discuss good practices and lessons learned without fear of reprisal. Space and time should be given for stakeholders to network and learn from one another, as these consultations might represent the only opportunity for them to do so, particularly in the case of the most marginalized groups.

ANNEX 1 METHODS AND TOOLS

Examples of different methods for fostering participatory engagement are included in the lists below:

In-person engagement tools:

Consultations

- Briefings
- Focus Group Discussions
- Foresight and alternative futures sessions
- Human-centred design
- Hackathons
- Community Fora, life history interviews, narrative storytelling
- Invite review of documents
- Invite progress reports on implementation and shadow reports
- In-person meeting with marginalized communities
- Data Verification

Remote, including real time, engagement tools:

- Mobile surveys and perception survey (U-report, mVAM, MyWorld)
- Participatory research – PMA methodologies include digital story-telling (DST), participatory action research (PAR), and Ground Level Panels (GLPs), a grassroots version of typical UN High Level Panels) with a Steering Committee of NGO and/or CSO partners
- Challenge Prizes
- Remote Hackathons
- Online consultations (for crowd-sourcing ideas and priorities)
- Radio call in shows
- Social media
- Webinars and other online collaborations
- Live calls
- Action campaigns
- Satisfaction surveys, community scorecards and citizen report cards (CRC), and
- Public and Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS).

ANNEX 2 STAKEHOLDERS

When adopting the 2030 Agenda, Member States committed to an implementation that would count on the participation of all stakeholders and all people. UNCTs have a role to play in supporting governments in reaching out and engaging with the broadest spectrum of stakeholders possible, considering national realities, reaching the furthers behind first and leaving no one behind.

The open list below indicated some potential key stakeholders to be considered by UNCTs when implementing these minimum guidelines. This open list should be expanded/revised to reflect national specificities:

The list of stakeholders includes, but is not limited to, the following sub-groups of stakeholders:

- CSOs
 - NGOs, including national and international and networks
 - Human rights organizations
 - Humanitarian Relief Organizations
 - Women’s rights organizations
 - Children’s rights organizations
 - Youth organizations
 - LGBTQIA organizations
 - Racial and Ethnic Justice Organizations
 - Refugee, Immigrant and Migrant Rights organizations
 - Peacebuilding Organizations
 - Organizations for people with disabilities
 - Organizations for the rights indigenous people
 - Organizations of ageing people
 - Climate change groups
 - Faith-based organizations
 - Volunteer organizations
 - Philanthropic organizations
 - Foundations
 - Individual activists
 - Education organizations
 - Community Health Organizations
 - Social Movements (online and in person)
 - Members of Marginalized Groups
 - Libraries, arts and cultural centres
- Parliamentarians
- Local Governments
- Workers’ Organizations
 - Trade Unions
 - Worker’s Cooperatives
- Business and Employers’ Membership Organizations
 - Employers’ Organizations
 - Private Sector Entities
 - Chambers of Commerce
- Research organizations and Academia
 - Think thanks
 - Universities
 - Training Institutes
 - Research Networks



UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GROUP



The United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) unites the 40 UN funds, programmes, specialized agencies, departments, and offices that play a role in development.

At the regional level, six Regional UNSDG Teams play a critical role in driving UNSDG priorities by supporting UN Country Teams with strategic priority setting, analysis and advice. At the country level, 130 UN Country Teams serving 165 countries and territories work together to increase the synergies and joint impact of the UN system.

The UN Development Operations Coordination Office (UNDOCO) is the secretariat of the UNSDG, bringing together the UN development system to promote change and innovation to deliver results together on sustainable development.

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