

UNA and Civil Society Networking Meeting  
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**Activities of the CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development, Vienna and prospects for future cooperation**

Summary of the a presentation given on behalf of the  
CoNGO Committee on Sustainable Development, Vienna by

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Mission of the committee:

The Vienna NGO Committee on Sustainable Development works to raise awareness of, hold discussions on and promote the advancement of the goals of sustainable development as addressed by the United Nations common system as a whole and, more particularly, by the United Nations organizations and agencies based in Vienna.

Its statutory aims are to:

- a) facilitate the activities of non-governmental organisations represented at the United Nations in Vienna, which are interested in questions relating to sustainable development;
- b) convene meetings and act as a forum for the exchange of information and views on matters of common interest; and
- c) facilitate liaison with the United Nations organisations and agencies working in the field of sustainable development.

In recent years the activities of the committee were closely linked to the process leading to the formulation and adoption of the SDGs as well as the preparation of the COP 21 in Paris regarding climate change. We invited experts to our meetings, providing a stimulus to our discussions on these topics.

Given the interest of the committee members we decided to form a drafting group to elaborate a statement regarding important issues in the formulation of the SDGs which we felt tend to be neglected. The paper we prepared () was then sent to the CoNGO partners worldwide as well as national and international organizations involved in the process of drafting the SDGs. We also used the opportunities offered within the frame of meetings organized by UN institutions to present and discuss our ideas. In 2015 the ACUNS meeting and the “70 years UN” in Vienna were the most recent events in which we were able to participate actively and present our paper.

The committee members all participated actively in the various national as well as international civil society efforts to make the SDGs really a global and inclusive process.

A meeting arranged jointly by the CoNGO SDC and UNIDO provided an excellent opportunity to discuss avenues to further improve cooperation on development issues of common interest and where competences of the committee members could be made better use of.

### **Activities in the future:**

Cooperation between civil society and UN organizations could be enhanced in three ways:

- Firstly, NGOs that are active in the field could collaborate with UN organizations at the **project level** in such areas as **corporate social responsibility, involvement of women and the improvement of working conditions.**

The NGO resources drawn on in such instances **are local NGOs ‘on the ground’.**

In the past, UNIDO e.g. had entered into cooperation with international NGOs such as **Oxfam or WWF,**

but for the most part its partners had been **business-related NGOs** or associations in **private-sector partnerships** or **local NGOs working on women’s rights.**

As the local NGO scene in Vienna has to offer a **very wide spectrum of knowledge and experience regarding sustainable development,** co-operation could be extended for the mutual benefit of all partners.

A new situation and need to cooperate due to the adoption of the SDGs:

Given the **importance of education** at all levels for **attaining the SDGs,** efforts to make active contributions in this realm, joint activities involving the Vienna based UN organizations and NGO’s as partners should be even further promoted.

**Knowledge creation** by means of **research relevant to sustainable development,** with a specific focus on emerging economies, could contribute significantly to **create innovative policies and projects.**

**Liaison with research institutions in Vienna** and their world wide networks could be considerably facilitated by joint activities.

A step forward in this respect was recently made by providing a **data platform** which provides a **basis for research projects**.

The recent discussion on the significance of “**Nexus issues**” on the success of sustainable development clearly warrants more attention and research efforts. The data and the experience based on many years of development project work of UN organizations as well as NGOs active in the field provide a unique opportunity to shed some light into this vital relation between different SDGs, **possible trade-offs** to be reckoned with and the **potential effectiveness of policies** considered .

The **exchange of ideas and insights** could greatly contribute to more effective and efficient development efforts in the future and should be facilitated and actively pursued.

Given the experience of the local NGOs in Vienna, the development of curricula in secondary education jointly with UN organizations could provide a solid basis for progress in many countries. This is particularly true for **programs aiming at enhancement of technical skills of the labor force**, constituting a necessary condition for future economic and social progress. This kind of training has had a long tradition in Austria, an experience that could be successfully used in the design of relevant educational programs.

- **Secondly**, the international NGOs, it is suggested, could seize the opportunity to **participate more actively in the deliberations of the legislative bodies** of Vienna based UN organizations (the General Conference and the Board meetings).

This culture of cooperation has not yet been firmly established, which is demonstrated by the fact that the **participation of the NGOs** in the more recent past had **not been ‘very vibrant’** as reflected in their low attendance.

Furthermore, the list of accredited NGOs had been recently culled and NGOs that were no longer active or had failed to respond to enquiries had been removed. Efforts to improve this situation have already started and need to be intensified in the future.

- **Thirdly**, the members of the NGO Committee might endeavour to bring their influence to bear on the Austrian government and secure the authorities' cooperation in **retaining the seat of UNIDO in Vienna** as an international organization dealing with industrialization.

It was pointed out that as international NGOs as distinct from local NGOs, the members would have little sway over the local authorities. **Efforts to convince more local NGO's** to become **accredited by ECOSOC** and become more active in international sustainable development matters will be made by CoNGO SDC. Support by UN institutions in Vienna could greatly facilitate and expedite this undertaking.

Stronger interaction with the Vienna based UN organizations could possibly make it easier for NGOs to lobby even more convincingly and intensively than hitherto for better compliance of the **Austrian** government with the internationally accorded **financial contribution commitments** for sustainable development. As private resources will have to be much more mobilized in the future, strong NGOs could be mediators as well as motivators for such efforts.