The 12th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda
Implementation of the Mandate and Programme of Work –
Focused Thematic Discussions and Interactive Dialogues
Palais des Nations, Room XVI, Geneva

The role of civil society organizations in realizing the right to development at the grassroots level

Wednesday 29 October 2025, 10:00 to 12:00

Concept Note
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Introduction

The Declaration on the Right to Development affirms that "States should encourage popular participation in all spheres as an important factor in development and in the full realization of all human rights." Within this framework of participation, civil society organizations (CSOs) play a critical role, given their knowledge, experience, and proximity to individuals and peoples, who are the right-holders of the right to development.

Since the beginning of its mandate, the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development (EMRTD) has strived to promote the consistent and meaningful participation of CSOs. In its engagement with CSOs, the EMRTD has encouraged them to raise awareness of, and to mobilize around, the right to development and, in particular, has learned from their initiatives, challenges, and the difficulties they face, including at the grassroots level. The grassroots knowledge held by CSOs has been – and continues to be – indispensable for the Expert Mechanism, States, and other stakeholders to better understand the barriers, historical and structural discrimination, as well as the violence and insecurity that hinder the realization of the right to development of individuals and peoples.

The EMRTD remains mindful that sustained dialogue with CSOs is essential to advancing the promotion and operationalization of the right to development. It also recognizes that, throughout history, CSOs have played a pivotal role in the evolution and transformation of human rights. CSOs engaged in the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to development, therefore play a complementary role to that of States, which are the primary duty-bearers in guaranteeing these rights.

Purpose

1. To identify whether there has been an evolution in the appropriation of the right to development by CSOs, to the extent that it has been integrated into their work with individuals and peoples, as well as into their dialogue and engagement with States and other stakeholders.

2. To highlight the strategies employed by CSOs to invoke the protection of the right to development of individuals and peoples and, where applicable, the outcomes achieved.

3. To identify measures and/or practices that could be implemented by States, in complementarity with CSOs, to ensure that individuals and peoples are aware of the right to development.

Guiding Questions

1. Based on the grassroots work of CSOs, can it be affirmed that there is growing awareness of the right to development and increased invocation of it in their interaction with State authorities and other stakeholders? Do CSOs invoke the right to development as a tool for legal and social advocacy?

2. At present, is the protection of the right to development more effectively advanced when linked to other rights (civil and political, economic, social, cultural, or environmental), or within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? Is it possible to invoke the protection of the right to development directly as an autonomous right?

3. Within the framework of States' human rights obligations, what are the principal measures and/or practices that could be undertaken to disseminate, promote, and implement the right to development? Which State measures could include the participation of CSOs as partners in the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to development?

Expected Outcomes

1. CSOs at the grassroots level employ the right to development in their work, are knowledgeable with its content, scope, and dimensions, and disseminate it so that it may be invoked by individuals and peoples.

2. The protection of the right to development of individuals and peoples vis-à-vis States and other stakeholders may be invoked in relation to other rights (civil, political, economic, social, cultural, or environmental) and within the framework of the SDGs. Progressively, the right to development may be invoked as an autonomous right.

3. States recognize CSOs as partners in the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to development. In this regard, they identify principal measures and/or practices that could be implemented to complement the role of CSOs in the dissemination, promotion, and defense of the right to development.

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