12th Session of the Expert Mechanism on right to development, 27-29 October 2025

Item 5 Implementation of the mandate and programme of work : (b) Focused thematic discussions and interactive dialogues : (ii) Public participation: a tool for development

Oral statement delivered by: Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23)

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Mr. Chair,

First of all, we thank all the speakers for their valuable insights.

Having working for 20 years in Zambia as a Medial officer, I have seen several examples of public participation and not all have been meaningful.

Public participation must be grounded in respect, transparency, and genuine empowerment. Too often, communities are "consulted" only to legitimize pre-determined decisions—a practice that turns participation into manipulation. True participation means that people are not passive recipients but active agents shaping policies and projects that affect their lives. It requires free access to information, inclusive dialogue, and shared decision-making power. The most marginalized peoples and groups should be included in the process. Development imposed without consent violates human dignity and undermines trust. Authentic participation ensures accountability, equity, and sustainability—because when communities lead the process, development truly serves their needs and aspirations, not external interests.

Communities must have access to information, freedom of expression, and genuine opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives and environments. When participation is inclusive—especially of women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities—development outcomes become more equitable, sustainable, and rights-based.

The Expert Mechanism's work is vital in guiding States to translate this principle into practice. There a need to strengthen legal frameworks that institutionalize participation at all stages of development policy—design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation—and to ensure protection for human rights defenders and civil society actors who facilitate this engagement.

Thank You !