



CIVICUS input on the Zero draft: Outcome document of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development

3 February 2025

CIVICUS is a global alliance of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening civil society and citizen action around the world. We work with our members and partners in over 175 countries around the world.

1. Protection of Civic Space

While the draft addresses pressing global challenges such as climate change and corruption, it overlooks a critical and increasingly urgent issue: the growing repression of civil society actors. According to the latest [CIVICUS data](#), over 70% of the global population resides in countries where civic space is severely restricted. This poses a direct threat to the feasibility of meaningful partnerships with civil society, which are essential for driving political will and ensuring the effective implementation of global goals. Without civic space, efforts by civil society and the media to expose corruption and highlight factors that contribute to climate change can be severely constrained. The repression, intimidation, and harassment faced by civil society actors and human rights defenders undermine trust, which is vital for fostering effective multilateralism and global governance.

Recommendation: *The draft must incorporate strong, explicit commitments to protect and promote civic space. This will ensure that civil society's role in advancing sustainable development goals remains secure, enabling long-term, inclusive progress.*

2. Supporting Locally Led Development

CIVICUS is deeply concerned about the ongoing reliance on transactional approaches to development, which often fail to build the long-term capacity of civil society. These approaches risk undermining local empowerment and hindering sustainable progress. Instead, the draft should place greater emphasis on supporting locally led development initiatives, which are

crucial for fostering community-based, grassroots solutions to the global challenges we face. Moreover, locally led development approaches help ensure that resources actually reach communities on the ground.

Recommendation: *Shift the focus from transactional, short-term development strategies to empowering civil society and communities at the local level to lead development efforts. This requires creating enabling environments where local actors have the resources, autonomy, and capacity to drive progress on the SDGs through predictable core funding.*

3. Acknowledging Civil Society as Independent Actors

The draft misses a critical opportunity to recognise civil society as an independent, vital actor in development. Civil society plays an essential role in advocating for and implementing sustainable development, yet its contributions are often overlooked. Without adequate recognition and support, civil society risks being excluded from being a key partner in shaping development strategies, limiting its potential to drive systemic change.

Recommendation: *Explicitly recognise civil society as an independent and key actor in the development process. Ensure that civil society's expertise and input are included in the shaping of policies and strategies, particularly those related to the SDGs implementation.*

4. Ensuring Sustainable and Responsible Financial Flows

The draft does not sufficiently address the intersection between development assistance—such as Official Development Assistance (ODA), the role of public development banks, and sustainable lending—and civil society participation and civic space. Without a framework that enables civil society participation and safeguards civic space, financial flows for development may inadvertently end up strengthening repressive state apparatuses and entrenched patronage networks, exacerbating exclusion and undermining sustainable development. CIVICUS is concerned that without clear protections for civil society, financial resources could be diverted in ways that reinforce systems of oppression rather than advancing the SDGs.

Recommendation: *Development finance, including Official Development Assistance (ODA), the work of public development banks, and debt architecture, must be aligned with efforts to protect and promote civic space and civil society participation. Financing should prioritise accountable, transparent, and inclusive governance, ensuring that funds are not diverted to repressive regimes or corrupt systems that curtail civic space and hinder the work of civil society, but instead contribute to meaningful and equitable development in line with the 2030 Agenda.*

5. Integration of Commitments to Protect Civic Space in International Frameworks

The protection of civic space is not just a national issue; it is a global concern that requires collective action. Recent international commitments, such as the Pact for the Future, underscore the importance of safeguarding civil society and human rights at the global level. The draft must align with these existing frameworks and reflect the international consensus on the critical role of open civic space in democratic governance and the promotion of human rights.

Recommendation: *Integrate the protection and promotion of civic space into international policies, particularly those that address human rights and development. This includes aligning the zero draft with recent global agreements that emphasise civil society's indispensable role in achieving the SDGs.*

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