



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

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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.

While the first draft of the Outcome Document rightly identifies key priorities such as climate change and illicit financial flows, it falls short in addressing foundational enablers of effective development cooperation—most notably, the protection and expansion of civic space, the adoption of locally led development principles, and the recognition of civil society as independent actors in the development landscape. These omissions undermine the credibility and potential impact of the proposed framework.

1. Protection and Promotion of Civic Space

The draft outcome document continues to marginalise an escalating global crisis: the widespread repression of civil society and the erosion of civic freedoms. This oversight must be urgently addressed.

According to [CIVICUS monitor](#), more than 70% of the global population lives in contexts where civic space is severely restricted. This pattern is not isolated—it is systemic, and it poses a direct threat to the viability of inclusive governance and global accountability. When civic actors, journalists, and human rights defenders face harassment, intimidation, and criminalisation, public trust in institutions erodes, and the capacity for meaningful dialogue and oversight diminishes.

Crucially, civic space is not just a democratic ideal; it is a functional necessity. Civil society and independent media are essential for identifying and exposing corruption, tracking illicit financial flows, and highlighting policy failures related to climate change and inequality. The lack of reference to civic space in the draft represents not only a normative gap but also a practical one that could render implementation efforts ineffective or co-opted by vested interests.

Recommendation:

The final document must contain clear, explicit commitments to protect and promote civic space. This includes recognising civic space as a necessary precondition for achieving the SDGs and for enabling inclusive, participatory multilateralism. Language already agreed upon in the *Pact for the Future* should be incorporated and operationalised.

“We reaffirm the importance of open and protected civic space as a cornerstone of sustainable development. We commit to taking substantive measures to safeguard the rights of civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and independent media to operate freely and without fear of reprisals as they contribute to the implementation and monitoring of financing for development efforts.”



2. Embedding Principles of Locally Led Development

Despite global consensus on the importance of context-specific, community-driven development, the first draft fails to adequately reflect principles of locally led development. References to local communities are minimal and largely instrumental, appearing only in relation to biodiversity conservation and blended finance mechanisms.

The draft neglects decades of international policy evolution, including the *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation*, which explicitly calls for “locally owned solutions that are appropriate to country contexts.” These principles have been reaffirmed in the *Grand Bargain 3.0*, the *Donor Statement on Locally Led Development*, USAID’s localisation agenda, and the *OECD DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society*.

Oversight of these commitments’ risks reinforcing a top-down, transactional model of development that sidelines the very actors best positioned to drive sustainable change. Moreover, failing to enable local communities limits the relevance, accountability, and impact of financing frameworks.

Recommendation:

To align with established global commitments and enhance both legitimacy and effectiveness, the final framework must embed locally led development as a core principle. This includes ensuring meaningful participation of local actors, predictable and flexible funding for community-based organisations, and the institutionalisation of mechanisms that shift power and resources to the local level.

“We commit to supporting locally led, context-specific development efforts through long-term, flexible financing and decision-making processes that acknowledge local actors and civil society organizations as independent actors complementing government efforts.”

3. Recognising Civil Society as Independent Development Actors

The draft maintains a narrow interpretation of civil society’s role, often placing it within the confines of multi-stakeholder engagement frameworks. This framing fails to reflect the normative advancement represented by the *Accra Agenda for Action*, which recognises civil society organisations (CSOs) as “independent development actors in their own right.”

Civil society brings distinctive value—rooted in proximity to communities, normative legitimacy, and advocacy capacity—that is complementary to, but independent from, the roles of states and the private sector. Without formal recognition of this autonomy, there is a risk that civil society will be confined to implementation roles, rather than being empowered as co-creators of policy and strategy.

Recommendation:

The Outcome Document must explicitly acknowledge civil society’s role as an autonomous pillar of the development ecosystem. This includes institutionalising their participation in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of development financing frameworks.

“We recognise civil society as an independent actor in development, essential to ensuring accountability, advancing human rights, and supporting equitable policy outcomes. We commit to ensuring civil society’s meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making.”



4. Ensuring Sustainable and Accountable Financial Flows

While the draft acknowledges the role of civil society and media in exposing illicit financial flows, it lacks the necessary safeguards to protect civic space. Without these protections, civil society and independent media cannot operate freely or safely undermining their ability to call out corruption, expose financial misconduct, and hold power to account.

Recommendation:

The Outcome Document should explicitly recognize that protecting civic space is essential to the transparent and accountable governance of financial flows. It should call on Member States to establish concrete frameworks and support mechanisms for civil society and independent media, whose efforts to expose illicit financial flows are critical to combating corruption and ensuring financial integrity.

“We commit to ensuring that all development finance mechanisms are guided by the principles of transparency, accountability, human rights, and meaningful civic participation. We will establish robust safeguards to prevent financial flows from reinforcing repressive institutions or weakening democratic governance, and we will put in place supportive frameworks to protect and enable civil society and independent media working to expose illicit financial flows.”

5. Aligning with International Norms and Policy Coherence

Despite its forward-looking aspirations, the first draft of the Outcome Document does not reference key foundational agreements that shape the international development agenda. The *Accra Agenda for Action*, *Busan Partnership*, and *Pact for the Future* all underscore the importance of civic space, inclusive development, and locally led approaches.

Their omission not only reflects a lack of continuity but also risks weakening the normative grounding of the financing framework. Policy coherence and institutional credibility require that new frameworks build upon—not bypass—existing international consensus.

Recommendation:

The Outcome Document must explicitly align with and reinforce these global agreements. This will ensure continuity of commitments and enable synergies across development, human rights, and financing frameworks.

“We reaffirm our commitment to the Accra Agenda for Action, the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, and the Pact for the Future. These agreements, among others, form the normative basis for inclusive and accountable development financing.”