



## Coalition 2030 Submission into the Stakeholder Forum Terms of Reference December 2018

Coalition2030 welcomes the opportunity to input into the Terms of Reference to the Stakeholder Forum. The Coalition is an alliance of almost 70 civil society organisations committed to and working towards upholding Ireland’s commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at home in Ireland and in over 50 countries by 2030. It is comprised of international and domestic civil society organisations, including environmental, anti-poverty and social inclusion groups, academics, and trade unions, whose expertise ranges from children and youth rights to environmental sustainability and from humanitarian relief to long term sustainable development.

We recognise the efforts that have already been made in establishing the Forum and to develop the Terms of Reference. As a broad Coalition of civil society representatives, we stand ready to assist the efforts of the Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment in making the Stakeholder Forum a robust and inclusive entity, fit for purpose in driving and accounting for Ireland’s progress in implementing the SDGs. As it embarks of its third meeting, it is imperative that the right structure, political and resource supports are put in place, as well as working arrangements to ensure the Forum can move forward with a mutually agreed and substantive programme of work and becomes a meaningful, participatory and action-oriented multi-stakeholder partnership.

### **1) Objective of the Forum**

The objective should be unequivocal in its intent and seriousness around ensuring implementation of the SDGs, and planning for SDG implementation going forward, as well as living up to the principles and values that underpin them, most notably in leaving no one behind and in reaching the furthest behind first.

Developing a sense of collective ownership of the SDGs is imperative, where each stakeholder and citizen has an understanding of their importance and role that they can play in implementing the SDGs, and is empowered to do so. The Stakeholder Forum has a key role to play in building a cohesive, whole of society approach to implementing Agenda 2030 which enables/facilitates collaborative partnerships and efforts – while identifying critical contributions within that unified approach that need to be progressed by key stakeholders, notably political leaders, Government Departments and state agencies, private sector actors, civil society actors, and citizens.

As such, enhancing and ensuring policy coherence across Government departments, agencies and civic initiatives should be a key objective of the Stakeholder Forum. This could include monitoring clearly identifiable targets in relation to PCD.

### **2) Purpose of the Forum**

The Coalition broadly agrees with the outlined purposes for the Forum. Going forward, however, it is imperative that the Stakeholder Forum goes beyond a focus on awareness raising and develops a substantive programme of work – the fruits and implications of which it can share with Government leaders at a high level, such as the Citizens’ Assembly, Climate Change Advisory Council and National Economic Advisory Council does on matters within their remits.

- Coalition 2030 stresses the need for having a substantive policy discussion component at each Stakeholder Forum, and this being made explicit in the TOR. These could focus on a

different theme/goal/sector at each Forum, which would help with operationalisation of, assessment against, and improvement of, the National Implementation Plan.

A strong focus on policy issues could particularly hone in on areas where research and gap analysis shows Ireland's SDG planning and implementation to be off course – whether that's the National Implementation Plan 2018-2020 in the short to medium term, or its successor, which will need to be conceived and developed collaboratively by all the stakeholders with little delay. The Forum should also address those more 'controversial issues' – whether in one or two specific forum events or as events related to the Forum where the Forum would receive feedback on the discussion e.g. farmers – climate and jobs; economics – challenging the neo-liberal model; etc.

The Forum's consideration of SDG-related policy issues should holistically address issues around achieving the SDGs within Ireland; Ireland's supports for the achievement of SDGs in other countries (especially poor and low-lying countries, given the Leave No-One Behind principle); and also any (negative) 'spillover effect' of Ireland's policies on the ability of other countries, particularly poor and low-lying countries, to achieve the SDGs.

Forum sessions on selected policy issues should include the following three elements: i) an input from a Minister or official from the relevant Department(s) – or Forum-commissioned independent researchers; ii) an input/response by a civil society representative; iii) opportunity for questions and discussion with the stakeholders at the Forum.

- After reflection (and further research and reflection as required), the Forum should be allowed to present collectively agreed policy options and suggested approaches in a form of structured dialogue for Government leaders to consider.

There needs to be clarity on what relation the Stakeholder Forum has to the inter-departmental working committee on the SDGs, how the Forum can best be kept abreast of its meetings and agenda, and how Forum considerations of items on that agenda can best feed back into the committee and the political system.

- The Forum must also challenge itself to consider areas of public education work more deeply, facilitating each stakeholder to consider how it can engage and contribute to the realisation of the SDGs, and what they mean for their particular context and capacity.
- The Stakeholder Forum has a clear role in operationalising the SDG National Implementation Plan and in monitoring its progress. As such, we would propose the inclusion of a specific reference to critically monitor Ireland's progress. The Stakeholder Forum can provide a key mechanism for benchmarking, accountability and transparency, and facilitate updates on SDG progress, concerns and obstacles to Government and the Oireachtas. This process would include discussion around realistic costing and prioritisation of targets and outcomes for Ireland, at home and abroad and giving regular feedback on how Ireland is progressing.
- The Stakeholder Forum can and should play a role in supporting and ensuring the strengthening of data and statistical capacity. Future Stakeholder Forums, or working groups, could have a focus on data collection, identifying all relevant sources of data that would also enable collection and analysis of data at a disaggregated level. Disaggregated data is crucial to leaving no one behind and to enable the development of effective policy responses. It is imperative that the Forum ensures that Ireland is living up to the spirit/principles of Agenda 2030 as well as realising progress against targets and indicators.

- A core purpose that should be explicitly referenced is around the collective conception, discussion and agreement of future Voluntary National Reviews, National Implementation Plans, and Progress Reports with a commitment to inclusive and participative processes.

### **3) Attendance at Forum meetings**

We note that the TOR does not contain or outline a list of stakeholders. While stakeholders are listed in the National Implementation Plan, in order to be clear that the Stakeholder Forum is a broad forum we would propose to name the relevant stakeholders again.<sup>1</sup> We further note the absence of reference to elected members of the Oireachtas. Given the necessity of a whole of government, intersectoral approach, it would be important that elected representatives of the Oireachtas are mentioned and encouraged to engage. Furthermore, the attendance of key relevant people from different Departments, including the Department of the Taoiseach, as well as all members from the Interdepartmental Working Group, is vital to ensuring and progressing a meaningful work programme that addresses whole of government policy coherence for the SDGs.

It is important that a list of confirmed Forum participants and their organisations, roles/interests, is circulated in advance of each meeting so that Forum participants can have quick reference to who is speaking, and on whose behalf, during proceedings – without resort to lengthy introductions for every contributor.

Whoever attends Forum meetings (politicians and Government officials as well as other stakeholders) should make themselves clear on the collectively agreed purpose, work plan and current priorities of the Forum, at any given time and for specific meetings. This would mean that meetings can proceed productively on a jointly agreed work programme, without always having to build the understanding of the latest-entry stakeholder. A Forum secretariat (permanent or rotating) should help enable this by keeping good records of work plans, progress, decisions taken, and collectively agreed Forum agendas and making these available through an online space for properly registered Forum stakeholders.

We welcome the reference to directly including voices from groups at risk of social exclusion and/or discrimination. It will be important that efforts are made to identify such groups as well as to ensure and facilitate the inclusion of such groups, with sufficient resources allocated and specific mechanisms and supportive processes created from the outset whereby this can become a reality. It should be noted that engagement should be guaranteed of people who are actually experiencing exclusion and discrimination, and not only 'at risk of'. Engaging with key rights groups, disability groups and organisations empowering vulnerable and marginalised groups to advocate for themselves will also be important in this respect. Furthermore, it would be useful to state why the reference is important, for example to add "This is important to realising the principles and values that underpin Agenda 2030, most notably in leaving no one behind and in reaching the furthest behind first."

It should be noted also that optimising stakeholder attendance and engagement will necessitate timely and regular information as to agendas, consultations, and feedback on reports.

### **4) Meetings of the Forum**

The TOR should include/provide more detail around how the Forum meetings will be organised, particularly on how it will be structured to look at implementation overall, and also across different

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<sup>1</sup> On page 24 of the Implementation Plan stakeholders listed include: NGO community and other civil society groups, the private sector, the trade union movement, the agricultural sector, youth, academia, the education sector, Government Departments, and the Local Government sector.

Goals. Sufficient detail and clarity should also be provided to ensure that what takes place and emerges from the Forum will actually deliver on the Forum's purpose. This could include building in the programme / work plan a mix of a thematic approach, reviewing progress against a cluster of particular SDGs, and allowing for regional meetings to take place.

There is a commitment to four Forums per year. This is positive, but without a clear structure as to how they will be organised, including clarity on decision-making principles/practice for the Forum, and robust/ambitious purpose, participants could soon disengage. Coalition2030 suggests that Forum stakeholders co-develop and collectively agree a substantive work programme – supporting and enhancing the National Implementation Plan – to facilitate regular Forum participants working collectively on a joint agenda.

The Forum needs to be properly resourced, so that its purpose and impact is not limited / confined by the four meetings per year but ensures a continuity of purpose, stakeholder engagement and collaborative work between meetings.

### **5) Working Groups**

The Coalition views the establishment of Working Groups as important to facilitate and ensure the ongoing momentum and work of the Stakeholder Forum, and indeed ultimate progress against implementation of Agenda 2030, between meetings. The Coalition would stress the importance of establishing the right mix of working groups to ensure that the Stakeholder Forum can realise its objectives and purpose. Of particular note, the importance of a Working Group focusing on implementation of the National Implementation Plan was raised at the last Forum, with a focus on 'the furthest behind first'.

We welcome the suggested areas in which Working Groups may be established (in current DCCAE draft).

Other Working Groups that should be considered include:

- one around research and data support (focusing particularly on those SDGs that a gap analysis shows Ireland is furthest behind on);
- discussing how policy coherence for the SDGs and/or wider PCD across government could/should be addressed for maximum effect;
- the role to be carried out or differentiated roles of different SDG champions and options around this model;
- a group to examine best learning and practice in terms of SDG implementation in other countries;
- a group to further ideas, and to mediate difficulties around, Forum structure, representation, decision-making processes, resourcing requirements, research support, relations with Government leaders, senior Department officials, the inter-Departmental working committee on the SDGs, the Oireachtas, and of course Forum stakeholder members. This could entail a representative group of stakeholders that would have responsibility for jointly convening the Forum, agreeing and communicating the agenda through an 'order of business committee'.

The Coalition2030 stands ready to support the work of finalising, establishing and inputting into these groups.

We would welcome the inclusion of a diagramme to show where the Stakeholder Forum fits in Ireland's work and reporting on the SDGs – to include the Interdepartmental Working Group and the Senior Officials Group.