

## Meaningful Consultation Factsheet

### Objectives of meaningful civil society consultation:

- To ensure that civil society, including women in all their diversity, marginalised and often excluded groups, community-based organisations (CBOs), LGBTQI+ and youth-led organisations can meaningfully participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- To ensure effective and impactful policies and policy implementations, building on the experiences and lived realities of those impacted by those policies.

### 10 Principles of meaningful engagement<sup>1</sup>:

1. All women have a right to meaningfully participate in decisions that affect their lives.
2. Individual activists, women's rights- and gender equality organisations should be engaged as equal partners in the planning, design and implementation of decision- making processes.
3. Individual activists, women's rights- and gender equality organisations should be supported to participate through a variety of appropriate, context- specific methodologies.
4. Individual activists, women's rights- and gender equality organisations should be supported, prepared and reimbursed for their participation.
5. Individual activists, women's rights- and gender equality organisations should be able to set and shape agendas.
6. Women's participation should be representative of women in all their diversity.
7. Participation should be accessible, ensuring access and resource needs are met.
8. Participation should be safe, empowering, respectful and not extractive.
9. Knowledge and learning generated by consultations should be shared with the communities from which it was informed on an ongoing basis.
10. Meaningful participation is not an end in itself – women should experience tangible benefits through their engagement.



<sup>1</sup> Based on: [https://beyondconsultations.org/images/Beyond\\_Consultations\\_Tool.pdf](https://beyondconsultations.org/images/Beyond_Consultations_Tool.pdf)

## Phases of meaningful consultation

### Phase 1: Ensure proper planning and communication:

- Ensure careful and comprehensive planning. Ensure sufficient time for CSOs and individual activists to consult their constituencies and to develop input.
- Make an inventory with key civil society representatives on the key themes that need discussion. If needed, cluster certain themes.
- Allocate budget for (travel) reimbursement of civil society stakeholders. Consider visa requirements.
- Develop and clearly communicate the complementary strategies for consultation, e.g. (thematic) group discussions (online/ offline in-country), requests for written input (with reasonable deadlines), and bilateral discussions with experts.
- Engage stakeholders beyond the usual suspects, e.g. CBOs in rural areas; informally organised feminist movements, LGBTIQ+, youth-led, religious and indigenous groups; community representatives. CSOs can play an important role in making the consultation more accessible for local activists, CBOs and those who lack digital access. For example, through explicit outreach and local dialogues.
- Implement proper online safety and security measures for digital consultations. Communicate these clearly and timely. Consider not all CSOs and individual activists have (safe) digital access.
- At country-level, empower embassies to host and organise a safe physical space at the embassy or other locations.
- Plan for multiple consultation rounds with feedback loops built in. Communicate this in a clear and timely manner, to ensure participants remain on board for the duration of the process.

### Phase 2: Ensure inclusive and meaningful participation:

- Provide the participants with a prior brief, for example a concept note to give them the opportunity to prepare in advance. Explain the purpose of the consultation and share key issues to be discussed.

- Set the stage: discussion takes place in a safe place, apply Chatham House rules if needed, encourage use of online chat (in case of digital consultations) to share key reference documents.
- Prioritise accessibility of the meeting spaces, virtual and physical. Provide interpretation into key languages, including sign language(s) and closed captioning. Use wheelchair accessible meeting spaces.
- Have a good technical moderator who sees to it everybody contributes and a content moderator who has an affiliation with the theme and ensures all critical issues are touched upon.
- Appoint at least two meeting minute takers.

### Phase 3: Ensure follow-up and broad ownership of the outcomes:

- Share consolidated notes of the discussion with participants and welcome feedback with a reasonable turnaround time. These notes reflect: a) key issues around the theme, b) key strategies to address the theme c) key recommendations. This will strengthen co-ownership of the outcome of the consultation sessions.
- Provide people who could not attend the chance to submit written input. To ensure a certain quality level, the following minimum standards for input are recommended:
  1. A clear link with the theme(s) of the consultation.
  2. Input should be clear, precise, concrete, and as much as possible supported with multiple resources. Resources can be existing research, resolutions, guidelines, (inter)national laws, policies, action plans, news articles, data collections, verbal or written statements, interviews, etc. Input can also be based on on-the-ground experience(s).
  3. Allow for innovative (untested) recommendations to be shared which could be piloted or included as a learning agenda.
- Debrief participants about what information is (not) used on the steps forward and why.