



International Conference of NGOs (ICNGO 2020)

Conclusions of the collective consultation of NGO partners on the Questionnaire concerning the preliminary proposals of the Director General on the Draft Mid-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41C/4) and the Draft Programme and Budget for 2022-2025 (41 C/5)¹

We are currently experiencing an unprecedented global crisis where civil society plays a leading role in responding to the pandemic. In this unique context and on the occasion of the 2020 International NGO Conference, and in accordance with the Directives concerning UNESCO's partnership with NGOs, NGO official partners were asked to reply to the questionnaire on the Director General's preliminary proposals concerning the Draft Mid-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41 C/4), as well as concerning the Draft Programme and Budget for 2022-2025 (41 C/5). This contribution relates to the cross-cutting strategic objectives, strengthening of the NGO-UNESCO partnership, global priorities, and recommendations on the Draft Programme and Budget.

Cross-cutting strategic objectives

Overall, NGO respondents believe that the four strategic objectives presented cover the world's most critical humanitarian problems and determine the means to solve them. However, the health crisis also highlighted new sensitive issues that could become "additional strategic objectives," such as health issues related to the pandemic.

While recognising that the terms used such as sustainable society and protection of the environment, cultural diversity and reduction of inequalities reflect the daily life, some NGOs draw attention to the need to link the strategic objectives and their effects to the realities on the ground and most particularly take into account the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on all the populations.

NGOs stress the importance of education—today and in the mid-term—as a powerful tool and a basis for any action to address crises and ensure better living conditions.

"Education for all" is an urgent issue to tackle growing inequalities, and quality education is a prerequisite for a more just world.

Education for all implies reducing the digital divide revealed by the crisis and considering the risk of non-return to school, especially for girls. Digital is both an opportunity and a threat. There is a risk that new technologies will perpetuate discrimination and increase violence; there is also concern about how to avoid misinformation and false information. This aspect is under-represented in the current description of the strategy.

More than ever, education needs to be rethought in terms of human rights, especially for the most vulnerable (people with disabilities, indigenous peoples and disadvantaged children).

Quality education requires training adapted to the world of education and also to families, who must together take up the challenge of distance learning. UNESCO should promote digital literacy opportunities with specialized training sessions, mobile libraries and Internet laboratories, access to computers and smartphones, especially for women and girls, and universal access to the Internet.

The concept of global citizenship remains a priority and needs to be deepened. It is also an asset in the fight against global warming. UNESCO must consider the impact of climate change on culture and the importance of its role in tackling global warming. NGOs specify that the strategic objectives can only be achieved with the active participation of the target beneficiaries, civilian populations, particularly young people who must bring about the change for a peaceful world.

Strengthening the partnership between NGOs and UNESCO

All NGOs that participated in the survey agreed that strengthening the partnership between NGOs and UNESCO is a prerequisite and should not be neglected in the Organisation's mid-term strategy, especially in this global crisis. Our response to the pandemic remains ineffective if we dismiss the expertise of NGOs that work closest to people. UNESCO and NGO partners could join together better to carry out complementary actions, in particular through enhanced collaboration with field Offices and National Commissions in order to achieve SDG 17.

The role of NGOs in the implementation of UNESCO's programmes cannot be overlooked nor should the need to establish close links with National Commissions in a North and South equal relationship. In order to achieve this objective more effectively, the dissemination of UNESCO's policies or guidelines through the UNESCO website could be further improved.

Considering the growing role of youth Internet communities and social networks as an active part of civil society would also benefit the achievement of the goals shared by NGOs and UNESCO.

The strengthening of the NGO-UNESCO partnership contributes not only to achieving SDG 17 but also to achieving all the SDGs, which is becoming increasingly constrained

due to the pandemic's impact on their implementation. Through grassroots action in line with UNESCO's priorities, NGO partners are key interlocutors and actors in building back the world to come.

NGOs also recall their role, in accordance with the Directives on Partnership, in contributing to developing its programmes and with their constructive input to UNESCO's reflection, particularly at this critical time.

UNESCO's global priorities

NGOs thank the Director General for the clarity of UNESCO's overall priorities set out in document 210Ex/22. They bring to her consideration the need for a methodology to implement these priorities and guidelines that would better incorporate the realities on the ground and people's needs. UNESCO's priorities could allow for a horizontal and better-defined collaboration with NGOs, as well as an in-depth exchange of knowledge.

NGOs urge to include in UNESCO's agenda the issues they consider urgent and essential. The freedom of expression, education for all, gender equality, accessibility to science and technology, climate change, a better synergy between UNESCO and NGOs are among the most frequently mentioned issues.

Furthermore, renewing the decisive role of education as a central and cross-cutting priority, NGOs stress the importance of intercultural dialogue and valuing diversity to achieve more peaceful and sustainable societies.

It should also be noted that most NGOs believe that UNESCO's attention to youth's and women's equitable participations should be more sustained.

Lastly, NGO partners thank the Director General for considering the fight against inequality. To go further, they highlight the importance of combating corruption and tax evasion, which are cross-cutting issues across all global priorities.

In order to best implement UNESCO's priorities, NGOs are considering the possible relevance of a joint NGO-UNESCO strategy in connection with other international organizations (African Union, AMCOW, OAS, CARICOM, AOSIS, as well as UN Women, youth organizations, WHO, etc.)

Draft programme and budget 41C / 5

NGOs have also addressed the draft programme and budget 41C / 5 and expressed their intention to view UNESCO as a transparent organization, requiring full accountability of its offices from its headquarters and national commissions.

A few critical issues were highlighted, including UNESCO's vigilance in ensuring that the poorest are not left behind and that the principle of the restitution of financial aid would make it possible to denounce bad practices penalising the beneficiaries of many programmes.

NGOs emphasize their role in supporting and investing in the implementation of

UNESCO programmes. They suggest highlighting NGOs' in-kind contributions (volunteering, non-formal education, personal care, administrative costs, etc.) in 41C/5. However, NGOs alert UNESCO to the decrease in their financial resources due to the consequences of the crisis, which raises fears about difficulties in maintaining their population aid programmes and, thus, their contributions to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

In an unprecedented crisis of confidence, sound financial management of UNESCO ensures its credibility and respect for its missions towards the global populations. In this context, NGOs welcome the introduction of a long-term financial management strategy.

In conclusion, all the NGOs consulted consider that the Director General's initiatives to intensify the dialogue between UNESCO and NGO partners and their participation in the Organization's working processes are crucial and timely in the context of the current crisis.

NGOs assure the Director General of their support and active participation in the reflections led by the Member States and the Secretariat, as shown by the NGOs' recent work on strengthening the NGO-UNESCO partnership.

NGOs thank the Director General for her proposals and they commit themselves to engaging with the Secretariat to strengthen the impact of UNESCO's strategic objectives and priorities in this context of an unprecedented global crisis which affects all the populations, particularly the most vulnerable ones.