Forum XI: Challenging inequalities and building a just and peaceful society
(provisional title)

First Meeting with participating NGOs,
April 17, 2019

Summary of the exchanges between the attending NGOs and the Liaison Committee’s representatives

Attending Committee Members: Marie-Claude Machon – Honoré (President), Philippe Beaussant (Vice-President in charge of the Forums), Marie-Christine Gries de La Barbelais (Treasurer and taking minutes for this meeting), Fatima Lahnait.

Excused: Richard Apeh and Abdel Basset Ben Hassan (Committee forum leaders) could not attend.

Participants’ list: Annexed.

The UNESCO Secretariat was represented by Ilona Geova, as delegated by Ms. Colombo.

Agenda

The participating NGOs should identify priority areas and topics deemed relevant in relation to the SDGs, especially n. 10, in order to build a program that is adequate for the purpose of the forum and compatible with the two-day event format.

It was emphasized by Ph. Beaussant that the time available for the preparation of this forum is rather short, therefore it would be good to quickly select the forum’s goal and topics.

Documents

A draft concept note (or preliminary note) was shared, and a copy is given to the participants during the meeting. The note condenses three texts: the proposals of, respectively, Richard Apeh and Abdel Basset Ben Hassan, and a joint summarized contribution by Marie-Claude Machon-Honore and Marie-Christine Gries de La Barbelais.

It was stated by MC Machon Honoré that this document is not a final concept note, but rather a document that should serve as a basis for further thinking from the NGOs that will take part in organizing the forum. The note proposes six topics, as a neither exhaustive nor restrictive choice.

Practical information and working arrangements

Forum’s dates: 8-9 July 2019, at UNESCO, Paris

- The date is close to the G7 meeting about inequalities. Marie-Claude Machon also mentions that the date nears both the submission date for the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report for 2020, which will discuss inclusion as a way to fight inequalities, and the July and September high level meetings (High Level Policy Forum - HLPF) in New York on “Empowering people and ensuring inclusion and equality”.
- The online platform to be used to register to the forum is not working and needs to be reviewed.
Today’s attendance list will allow correcting potential errors in the mailing list used to share meeting invitations. Ms. Colombo’s service will receive a communication to update the list of partner NGOs.

Teresa Kennedy (a member of the previous Liaison Committee) kindly took on the task of creating a platform (she had designed the Science Forum platform) which will be quickly set up to involve in the work as many NGOs as possible, especially those which don’t have representatives in Paris. Ph. Beaussant specified that there will be a choice of 5 or 6 themes for the NGOs to ask questions and make comments.

The themes of the forum cannot be chosen within today’s meeting, since it is necessary to identify the predominant orientations that arise from opening the discussion to all NGOs via the platform.

Sub-working groups focused on each chosen theme should be created in Paris, when appropriate.

The two leaders appointed by the Liaison Committee will be joined by four representatives chosen by the NGOs during the meetings, in order to form a six-members steering group.

The units of UNESCO that will collaborate are not yet established.

Debates on the forum’s objective and themes

Several participants mentioned the most visible inequalities in the current context:

- Inequalities to access political decision-making within a democratic framework
- Inequalities in the workplace, in the business world
- New inequalities related to technology and "artificial intelligence", in particular for women
- Inequalities generated by discrimination
- Inequalities resulting from conflicts
- Inequalities resulting from shortcomings in education, the need for education to be inclusive
- Enduring inequalities due to our mindset: changing the way in which we think is just as necessary as investing money in SDG 10

“Education is key to any action to fight inequality”, MC Machon recalled, with unanimous approval from the audience.

During the discussion, it rapidly became clear that the fight against inequality must go hand in hand with the fight against extreme poverty. Several people expressed themselves in such terms. "Challenging inequalities" must address the situation of the 800 million people living in extreme poverty worldwide. It is within extreme poverty that all inequalities accumulate and the gaps widen.

SDG 1, therefore, must be considered as well as a reference together with SDG 10, when discussing the topics for this forum.

MC Machon asks MC Allez (ATD Quart Monde) to make a proposal in this respect.

Corollary remarks: inequalities not always generate poverty (as China’s current development shows). Inequalities are not the same everywhere.

The question of the causes of inequalities emerged from the debate, in particular in relation to the use of wealth, generally seen as "bad".

To fight against inequalities we must know the causes, investigate the causes of inequalities.

But would it be productive to engage in a "politically incorrect" controversy and a pessimist approach, listing all causes of inequalities that an NGO forum could anyway not resolve?
"Challenging inequalities" should rather be oriented towards the search for solutions, and finding successful occurrences in the fight against inequalities.

The objective of the forum must be well defined and clear for everyone, so that the selection of the topics comes easier. Ph. Beaussant prompted that this point is also on the agenda.

Several people expressed a concern about the risk of addressing the different topics in a superficial way, if, ambitiously, too many of them are selected.

Some of the mentioned topics - such as the business world and technology - will be addressed in other scheduled forums; therefore they might be discarded for the purpose of this one.

It was proposed to rather talk about equal opportunities, but this is not in line with what was expressed by the CIONG.

It was also mentioned that it is vital that youth is present and expresses their opinion in this forum. Their crucial role within the events and political changes currently ongoing in Algeria and Sudan is recognized. Mr. Dauny mentions a recent Pax Romana youth forum on good governance.

Two personalities were mentioned (as potential invitees) Stevie Wonder (singer and UNESCO’s goodwill ambassador) and Greta Thunberg (young Swedish climate change activist, currently having a considerable impact in the public debate and the media).

Both issues of women empowerment and young people’s engagement are cross-cutting and should be considered a priority. Especially since inequalities are growing to the disadvantage of women and girls, due to delay they experience in acquiring knowledge in the field of information and communication technology (ITC), a sector that is still mainly male-dominated.

The meeting closes after a two-hour long debate, which saw the active participation the attendees’ large majority.