

## Summary of the “Future of the CSO policy forum session” at the Spring meetings 2016 (Friday April 15)

The 2 ½ hour session was very well attended with about 120 people in the room.

### Introduction by the WB, IMF and CSO representative – Overarching context and progress to date

Nicolas Mombrial (IMF) and Edith Jibunoh (World Bank) explained the events that led up to the feedback session:

### Background

1. Ahead of the Annual Meetings, Lima October 2015, **23 CSOs signed on to a letter titled: “[Protecting the voice of civil society at the World Bank and IMF meetings](#)”** in which they expressed concerns about the recent changes to the CSO forum, in particular concerns with autonomy, visibility and participation (see [the letter](#) for more details).
2. **A response from the WB and IMF** was sent to CSOs expressing the institutions commitment *“to preserve the objectives of the forum as a means for engagement and a platform for a globally and thematically diverse group of civil society to highlight their concerns and hold us accountable”* and answering some of the concerns raised in the letter on the forum’s guidelines, location and the integration with the formal meeting schedule.
3. **CSO representatives met with WB and IMF staff at the Annual meetings** in Lima to talk about the future of the forum. A letter from WB and IMF was sent to CSOs after the meeting expressing the institutions’ commitment to work before the upcoming Spring meetings on some of the concerns raised while explaining that a realistic timeline for an address of several of the concerns would be the Annual meetings in October 2016.
4. In order to solicit views from a diverse CSO community, **an online feedback hub was launched from January - April 2016. 17 CSOs provided input for consideration by WB and IMF on what could be done better and ideas for moving forward. The session convened at the 2016 Spring meetings was a follow up opportunity, building on the collection of views from the online feedback and the meeting in Lima.**

### Feedback Session

Nicolas and Edith reiterated the institutions’ commitment to work with CSOs in support of a high impact Civil Society Policy Forum and detailed the changes made since Lima:

- The **visibility of the CSO forum** on [the Spring meeting website](#) has been significantly improved by including, in the official schedule, for every day, a list of CSO policy forum sessions with a link to the daily schedule and the description of each session. A page about the CSO forum has also been added to IMF connect, which is the app that delegates use for the Spring and Annual Meetings (*WB and IMF will continue working on improving the forum visibility and welcome new ideas*).
- A **space for CSOs in the IMF HQ2** has been reinstated so that CSOs can be close to the media.
- The **number of sessions organized/sponsored by the WB and the IMF were reduced** to 3 to allow more space for CSO hosted sessions.
- It has been clarified that **journalists can attend the CSO forum** without an escort.
- The **deadline for the selection of forum sessions and the date of release of the final schedule was brought forward** to make it easier for participants to finalize arrangements for their sessions and allow the time for visa arrangements and other logistics to be secured.

A **representative of the Bretton Woods project** (one of the signatories to the CSO letter to President Kim and Managing Director Lagarde) **welcomed the desire expressed by the WB and the IMF to open the space for ideas and to work on improving the forum. While recognizing some of the physical space constraints, he noted that improvements could and should still be made and this was a space where CSOs' suggestions would be necessary.**

#### Concerns and suggestions raised by CSOs

The moderator, Alex Sardar (Civicus), opened the floor for CSOs **to make statements and provide proposals for improving the forum.**

Several CSO representatives insisted that the forum should go beyond **visibility, CSO networking and knowledge sharing, and should be about influencing opportunities.** A participant attending the meeting for the first time proposed that CSOs **organize an opening press briefing to express their views** and suggested that CSOs organize themselves to **agree on CSO priorities for the meetings.**

In that regard, participants asked the WB and IMF to share the list of CSOs **participants and of IMF/WB sponsored fellows** in advance of the meetings to enable **networking** and pre meetings

preparation. They also asked for the **list of people organizing sessions** to be made public so that they could connect with them and propose names.

*There was an agreement that while the WB and IMF CSO teams are available to support CSOs' participation, CSOs must themselves develop strategies for effectively influencing delegates. The WB/IMF will provide CSO participants information about other participants as long as the participants agree to have their private information shared.*

Several participants expressed the concern that there were not enough bilateral **meetings with IMF and WB officials on national, regional or specialized issues**. CSOs also asked for more meetings with national delegations.

*The WB and IMF colleagues clarified that government delegates' schedules were within the mandate of the Board's Executive Directors and suggested that CSOs approach the Executive Directors offices if they wanted to schedule meetings with delegates from governments. Several bilateral meetings between senior Bank staff and CSOs including meetings with the Africa VP, Latin America VP, East Asia VP and the Senior Director for Gender. Several CSOs also met with the IMF chiefs of missions. The WB and IMF officials remain open to organizing more of these type of meetings at the forthcoming Annual meetings.*

CSOs enquired about the process for selecting panelists and requested **more IMF and WB officials' participation in the CSO forum sessions**. CSO also suggested that the WB/IMF work on increasing the number of **CSO representatives in the program of seminars** and raised the **idea of having a CSO session as part of the seminars**. Questions were asked about why some of the meetings are "off the record".

*The selection of session panelists is the responsibility of the hosting CSO. There were 21 representatives from the WB and IMF in the Spring Meetings forum sessions. The WB and IMF CSO teams are willing to work with the organizers of the sessions to encourage even more Bank/IMF participation where possible. The WB and IMF teams stated they were working on strengthening CSO presence in the seminars and **agreed to share as soon as possible the themes of the next meetings for CSO suggestions for possible speakers**. The idea of a CSO sponsored session as part of the program of seminars will be discussed internally. In response to the question about off the record meetings, WB/IMF staff explained that this was aimed at encouraging a frank, candid discussion with officials.*

Additional Issues raised with follow up actions TBD

CSOs also raised concerns with the process for **selection of sessions during the forum**. While the process had improved for the Spring meetings, CSOs asked for the selection process to **be more transparent with greater ownership by CSOs**. It was agreed that **clearer guidelines need to be developed and there were suggestions for a CSO working group to work with the WB and IMF on the selection process**.

CSOs further raised the important linkage between the location of the CSO forum and ability of CSOs to influence. While the move to the World Bank I building space 2 years ago has enabled the forum to be convened in one place, include more sessions and be held on a higher floor (the previous location was the basement of the World Bank's main complex building), **some CSOs felt that the fact that the forum is not in the main WB and IMF buildings has reduced attendance by delegates and the non CSO general public, preventing it from being an influential space. While it is only one block away, delegates and media representatives do not and often cannot** make the effort to come. While there is no space in the WB or IMF main buildings that would allow for all the CSO forum events to convene in the same place, the idea was raised that **there could be a CSO hub in the WB basement** (as before) but that **sessions could be located in different rooms across the two main buildings to make the Forum a more integrated part of the Spring and Annual meetings**.

*IMF and WB staff will look at options in terms of space but it was agreed that the **CSO community needed to determine a preference for location that is agreed upon by the majority of CSOs**.*

*The idea of a **CSO working group** to build ownership of the design and selection of sessions in the Forum was welcomed by the WB and the IMF. However, both institutions insisted that the **selection of members of this CSO working group must be the responsibility of CSOs and must be done in a representative manner** taking into consideration variances in size, thematic focus and geography of different CSOs. A proposal came from **a CSO representative to create an informal group and convene over e-mail to continue the discussion and come up with more concrete ideas**. A number of CSO representatives at the meeting expressed an interest in participating in this group. Since not all CSOs who were at the "Future of the CSPF" session were able to attend the last part of the session, and even more CSOs who were not able to attend these Spring meetings might also be interested in participating, **it was agreed that the call for volunteers would be sent to a wider list**.*

***Next steps: The World Bank and IMF teams are already working on some of the requests made during the meeting (forum's visibility, increased CSOs presence in the program of seminar, looking at alternative venues...). Some of the CSOs representatives will be in touch***

*soon with the rest of the community to ask for expression of interests for the working group. Once a representative group is created, it will work with the WB and IMF CSO team on some of the issue mentioned above.*