

Tenth Coordination Meeting on International Migration  
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***Fix, focus and reach: Civil society and Agenda-setting  
for the High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development 2013***

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Meetings are often criticized for being “just talk”—as if talk is the opposite of action. Of course not. But today we’re taking a step even further “back”—not doing even the usual “just talking”. We’re *thinking*. Yes there has been *some* thinking on this upcoming second High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. But *not enough* in civil society, and I think it’s fair to say the same for many international organizations and states.

**What a difference 6 years makes!** i.e., 6 years since the first High Level Dialogue (HLD). Compared to today:

- the Coordination meetings *then* were nearly empty, with a handful of believers or visionaries... or dreamers... with nay-sayers and dooms-dayers too, but virtually no civil society other than from academia.
- there has been a proliferation of new “G’s: since: the GCIM in the lead up to that first High Level Dialogue; the GMG, GFMD; now GAMM, and this past year in civil society, the new GCM<sup>1</sup>
- exponential growth in *regional* processes on migration, economic communities; mobility.
- at the *international* level, there has been so much change at least in the *discourse* these past 6 years—some confidence building and common ground building. It has to make one wonder: what may be possible??—not by unanimity (never get it!); not by consensus (difficult to count on) but by *majority sense* and usually a smaller set of stakeholders together moving *forward*.

Now at the same time, in the “real” world:

- while millions of migrants and their families are succeeding, many millions are suffering, *abjectly*. Millions are blocked from rights or access to rights and potential of all kinds for themselves and societies
- there is agreement that international migration may well double over the coming decade with demographic and labour needs of north and “BRICS”<sup>2</sup> countries, including unprecedented demand in China for workers and women

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<sup>1</sup> Respectively the *Global Commission on International Migration*, appointed by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan which published a landmark report and set of recommendations in 2005; the *Global Migration Group*, now 16 agencies of the UN concerned with migration issues plus the International Organization for Migration; the *Global Forum on Migration and Development*, created by the HLD in 2006; the *Global Approach to Migration and Mobility*, promulgated by the European Commission in 2011, and the *Global Coalition on Migration*, a coalition of international civil society networks also launched in 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The group of emerging economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

- there seems growing recognition that inefficiencies in labour markets, and financial and human waste in current enforcement-only, enforcement-first and enforcement-most approaches are a scandal;
- and that it is in the interest of states and communities as well as migrants to do this differently: some say by “managing” migration better, some say by better “governance”.

In any case, today it’s standing room only here: the whole GMG bus—GMG-*plus*, which is terrific; with civil society engaged even on panels; with work on the sixth GFMD well underway; with strong Chairs for the 2014 and 2015 GFMDs stepping up; and coming soon, the second High Level Dialogue.

Now: some reflection *on the role of civil society* from the Forum to the Dialogue, and in particular, agenda setting for the HLD. I’m going to frame these thoughts as “**FIX, FOCUS & REACH**”:

- the need to **FIX** some things that need to be fixed in the GFMD and the formula from the first HLD;
- the need to **FOCUS** on achieving outcomes on a manageable set of pre-selected *specific* issues of substance where there is objectively both solid work done and convergence; and at least one of the BIG questions
- the need to **REACH** in this—to not be too cautious.

I will speak not for all of civil society, but as *Coordinator of civil society GFMD activities*, with only one role and some funding for this coordination through the year of the HLD and 2014. At times I’ll report from what we’ve gathered in double plenary sessions during the civil society days of the GFMD two months ago (focussed entirely on the Future of the Forum and High Level Dialogue) as well as from breakout sessions there which, together with the 70 evaluations we’ve received of the civil society days, were all *specifically* asked for perspectives on the Forum’s future and the HLD. We have further consulted with a number of civil society leaders, but we have not yet conducted the systematic consultation we usually do. I also appreciate and incorporate from *written* input that a number of our civil society partners have provided to this meeting—all leaders in GFMD civil society, including the Global Workers Justice Alliance, Hague Process on Refugees and Migration, International Trade Union Confederation, Migrants Rights International, NGO Committee on Migration, National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, and United Methodist Women, as well as ICMC’s own written contribution.<sup>3</sup>

So: “3” and “4”: the 3 greatest dangers, and 4 propositions to ***fix, focus and reach*** in setting the HLD process and agenda.

The **three greatest dangers** in thinking and trying to act towards this HLD:

- the danger to miss on *calendar*: i.e., to move too slowly or be *told* it’s “too late”
- the danger to miss on *target*—either aiming too low (e.g., conflating the High Level Dialogue entirely with the GFMD) or too high, e.g., by trying to do everything. As with any other agenda, choices need to be made. And the GFMD should be no more than *one* item on the HLD agenda. This is the High Level Dialogue on *International Migration and Development*, not the High Level Dialogue on the *Global Forum* on Migration and Development.
- the danger to miss on *inclusion*: of *civil society*, including especially migrants and diaspora, and the private sector.

**So: FIX, FOCUS and REACH, with four propositions.**

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<sup>3</sup> All of these inputs and other material for this meeting are available on the UN DESA website, at [www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/tenthcoord2012/tenthcoord2012.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/tenthcoord2012/tenthcoord2012.htm).

## 1. We need to *FIX things that need to be fixed* in the formulae of both the GFMD and HLD

**The 1st proposition** *The HLD 2013 is not the same as, and can be no less, than 2006.* We are/the world is not who we were 6 years ago. This next HLD cannot be less—not even the same—as the last one.

### • HLD outcomes

- like others, civil society looks for the 2013 HLD to be solid; with achievements: **OUTCOMES**, not just a report of the Chair as in the 2006 HLD. Of course this means preparation—on substance—in advance; with collaboration and advocacy among civil society, states and international organizations.
- Again, so much has moved since 2006: can the HLD now really put some things together?
- So, for an **HLD agenda item: OUTCOMES**. No compromise on this!

### • Civil society participation

- Civil society is the every-day, on-the-ground actor and partner with states and international organizations in positive programmes of migration and development everywhere, with global presence, major resources and outcomes.
- Civil society was disappointed in the rules of engagement in the 2006 HLD, with such limited participation, and in the recent Informal Thematic Debate on Migration and Development held at the UN last May. “Eating in the kitchen” is not enough.
- Civil society has demonstrated growing voice and collaboration in these processes: confidence-building and common ground-building.
- Civil society absolutely expects greater participation in the 2013 HLD

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> proposition** *Recognize the broad convergence across stakeholder groups that the GFMD is important, but not “the solution” in its present form.* Of course the GFMD has been evolving—even more than incrementally, and sometimes in jumps. But:

- the GFMD is *not sustainable* in its current form! Peter Sutherland, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Migration keeps underscoring this point. The GFMD is still too much lurching, too *ad hoc*: on issues, leadership, year-to-year rotation of Chairs, and FUNDING. Honestly, everyone knows this.
- the GFMD clearly has potential to achieve more—but *it must be “re-charged”*. While two assessments (by the States and by the MacArthur Foundation) are currently in progress, concrete impact and achievements have already demonstrated, just for example, through the existing two GFMD Working Groups (Policy coherence and Data, and Protection), e.g., on census and data collection, Migration Profiles, and costs and vulnerabilities in migration. On this point, civil society is unequivocal: more is needed from the GFMD: outcomes, follow-through and result. Many international organizations, and states, agree.
- So for a **HLD agenda item**: rather than “Friends of the Forum”, a “FIX of the Forum”. There is a need to fix even what has clearly been moving and improving.

--- that’s **FIX**, i.e., mostly “process”. Now:

## 2. We need to **FOCUS**: on substance in the HLD, *linked to the GFMD but not only the GFMD*.

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> proposition** *“Process” is no substitute for “substance”*. We need to kick the “process habit”: losing too much time talking disproportionately about *process*. The term “High level” in “High level dialogue” should not be just an indicator of participants. “High level” should be an indicator of the quality of focus and discussion, of *substance*.

**And there are two types of substance:** *specific* migration and development phenomena that states, civil society and international organizations want to address; and then the really *big* questions in migration and development.

Among the **specific** migration and development phenomena that the HLD might propel to outcomes, several were surfaced by civil society at the GFMD 2011 as having outcomes “within reach”, and in particular measures to improve recruitment and development processes, and cooperation on piloting mechanisms for labour and skills matching. Others often pointed to are the development of a comprehensive set of migration indicators, including within the recent (and welcome) proliferation of Migration Profiles, and a formal assessment of the current status of human rights of migrants.

So for an **HLD agenda item**: put some specific issues on agenda, *expressly for outcomes*.

At the same time, there is a growing call in civil society for putting on the agenda **one or two big questions** that clearly only an HLD can propel—if it dares. The big questions like:

- the rule of law and international migration
- rights-based global governance of migration
- development alternatives to forced migration (not necessarily root causes in themselves)
- mechanisms for safe and legal labour migration
- protection of migrants who are forced, stranded and victims of violence or trauma in transit and destination countries
- affirming and re-charging ILO’s protection mandate for migrant workers
- moving the GFMD under “a” UN normative framework with structural support and continuity, and greater engagement of civil society;
- shifting the GFMD from nexus to labour migration directly

SO for a **HLD agenda item**, linked to but at a higher level than the GFMD: put on the agenda a set of substantive questions—one or two on specific issues plus at least one of the big questions, *explicitly oriented to outcomes*.

Of course: the hard thing is choosing: first, which manageable set of specific issues where there are outcomes “within reach”, and then which big question or questions. We cannot do them all!

--- **that’s the need to FIX parts of the process and FOCUS on substance. Now lastly:**

### **3. We need to REACH.**

**Voilà, the last proposition:** **BE BOLD.** There are too much brains, energy, time and travel cost in these rooms to stand still, or just “inch” forward. At least in these processes, the last 6 years have *far* exceeded what anyone imagined would have been possible; and there has been too much movement forward to go backward now.

### **4. In closing, where does civil society go next, and more precisely, WHO, HOW & WHEN civil society engages in the HLD? (... because no one ever really escapes from “process”!)**

#### **WHO?**

- Civil society’s bottom line on these important global discussions is *always* to participate at the table; genuinely in dialogue. For the 2013 HLD, this means:

- not adopting GFMD strictures regarding civil society engagement, i.e., segregated discussion groups, a few minutes of plenary reporting to states, limited common space, and no participation in roundtables with states;
- not simply replicating the formula for the HLD 2006, where, though the interactive hearings of that were held three months prior to the 2006 HLD had great value, they somehow became a substitute for meaningful participation within the HLD itself (in which civil society was given only two limited participations per roundtable, with the rest of civil society relegated to passively viewing the HLD in a side room);
- absolutely not the minimalism of the Informal Thematic Debate held last May, where many were in room but only 3 NGOs were given some 2 -3 minutes to speak.
- How many civil society participants? There is always tension between, on the one hand, opening to as many as possible and on the other, engaging what may be considered to be a more “manageable” number. Frankly, this is a question even where it is only civil society itself meeting, but it presents a much more serious concern with respect to incorporating civil society participation meaningfully together in processes with states and other actors. It will be helpful to reflect on the experiences in the effectiveness of the different approaches to civil society, state and international organization numbers in the common space at the Global Forum meetings in Mexico and Switzerland.
- Civil society and other actors also should examine other models of civil society engagement in international and regional processes, including processes in which national civil society organizations formally elected the “quota” they were given of their own delegates to the Global Forum meetings in the Philippines in 2008 and Switzerland in 2011.

#### **HOW does civil society prepare for the HLD?**

- **on HLD process and modalities:**
  - Civil society needs to step up, actively explore existing models, build an effective consensus and direct its energy and advocacy with decision-makers. To jump-start this effort and do some of the hunter-gatherer research for this purpose, I am pleased to announce that the NGO Committee on Migration here in New York has just launched a *Working Group on Modalities*.
  - Surely civil society will once again also consider organizing a process *parallel* to the official 2013 HLD activities, like the Peoples Global Action that grew out of disappointment with the rules of engagement in the HLD 2006.
- **on HLD substance and agenda:**
  - there is a need to build civil society clarity and convergence on the set of two or three specific questions open to achievable outcomes and the one or two big questions for the HLD agenda, and
  - to advocate, in particular with the states and international organizations most active, using among other things the Civil Society days of the GFMD 2012 in Mauritius, for deeper thinking, strategy and “surround sound.”
- **Calendar:** we understand that the UN Second Committee and other UN offices will be crafting formal proposals on 2013 HLD process (including modalities of engagement) and agenda (substance) *as early as this September*, with the UN General Assembly adopting guiding elements in a resolution *in December*.

**So: WHEN does civil society engage??? ... now.**

*Thank you.*