

FORUS POST-2030 VISION PAPER

Political & Scenario Mapping Report

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Forus: Post-2030 Vision Paper

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Batrinu, Blomqvist and Mace | March 2026

Executive summary

- **The post-2030 debate is already taking shape in a volatile context**, marked by geopolitical fragmentation, shrinking civic space, constrained development finance and deepening systemic crises — well before formal negotiations begin in 2027.
- **Three plausible trajectories — continuity (most likely), fragmentation and ambitious reset (least likely) — will shape both the negotiation environment and the substance of the next global development framework.**
- **Financing is the central fault line across all scenarios**, particularly debates on debt restructuring, lending reform, and domestic resource mobilisation, with major implications for equity and implementation.
- **Civil society enters this process from a structurally weaker position than in 2015**, yet this moment creates space for strategic actors to shape early agenda-setting before positions harden.
- **Forus is uniquely positioned to influence both process and substance**, by connecting local realities to global negotiations, building cross-regional alliances, and advancing robust strategies that hold across multiple political futures.

This report explores the emerging political, institutional and geopolitical dynamics shaping negotiations around a post-2030 global development framework, at a moment of heightened uncertainty for multilateralism and global cooperation. While formal negotiations will not begin until the 2027 SDG Summit, early discussions are already underway. These, however, are already shaped by a fragmented and politically fluid environment, marked by shrinking civic space, constrained development finance amid sweeping cuts to ODA, systemic global crises, shifting power balances and a UN system facing fiscal constraints and challenges to its relevancy. Forus, through its network of 73 National Platforms and 7 Regional Coalitions representing over 24,000 civil society organizations worldwide, is uniquely positioned to influence this process. Forus' global reach allows to influence impactfully at the national level and elevate local voices during high-level negotiations, while its track record of research and advocacy on the SDGs gives it both credibility and the potential to play a leadership role during the post-2030 discussions. Against this backdrop, this report combines political mapping with strategic foresight to help Forus assess how its core priorities might fare under different future trajectories, and to identify strategies that remain robust across uncertainty.

The report outlines three plausible scenarios for the post-2030 process, focused on the negotiation environment as well as the resulting framework. While all three scenarios were posed as hypothesis at the onset of this project, they were further refined during an analysis phase during November and December 20205. This included an extensive desk review of public sources on the SDGs, global development and the nascent debate on the post-2030 agenda, including Forus material, UN and civil society reports, and others. In addition, consultants carried out 13 in-depth interviews with experts. A **continuity scenario**, which emerged as the most likely through the research and interview phase, would extend the SDGs with targeted refinements, focusing on implementation, financing reform, localisation and coherence with other global frameworks. This would require Forus to balance advocacy for inclusive processes with substantive improvements to implementation, financing, and accountability mechanisms. A **fragmentation scenario** would see negotiations weakened or derailed by geopolitical tensions, leading to a more regionalised or issue-specific development landscape with reduced global ambition and limited civil society access. Forus would need to pivot from global advocacy to supporting members' engagement with regional frameworks while maintaining network coherence and shared principles. An **ambitious reset scenario**, while assessed as the least likely, would involve a more fundamental reimagining of global development—potentially centred on human security, systemic risk or

reforms to global governance and finance—driven by dissatisfaction with the SDGs’ limited implementation and the changing balance of global power. This presents a great opportunity for Forus to advance transformative change around localisation and power shifting, but also carries highest risk if negotiations become polarized or completely stuck at worse allowing continued backsliding on development goals.

Across all scenarios, financing emerges as a central fault line, with growing emphasis within – and without – the UN framework on debt restructuring, improved lending terms for the Global South and stronger domestic resource mobilisation. The report finds that civil society enters the post-2030 process in a weaker structural position than in 2015, but that this moment also presents an opportunity for networks such as Forus to act as conveners, sense-makers and strategic advocates. By focusing early on shared priorities, building alliances across regions, and remaining adaptable to multiple political pathways, Forus can position itself to influence both the process and substance of the post-2030 agenda, regardless of how negotiations ultimately unfold.

“Financing is not an end in itself, but it is a critical aspect to any Agenda. this starts from local sources (taxes, inter-governmental frameworks) - this needs to be seen as a solution to the complicated context we live in.”

Sebastien Vauzelle

*Head of the Local2030 Coalition
Secretariat*

Introduction

The post-2030 process is open and politically fluid. While it officially only begins at the 2027 SDG Summit, informal talks are already underway, including among think-tank and CSO networks at the regional level, among Member States and at the UN level, including in agencies such as DESA and at the Summit of the Future. Despite this, few CSO networks have yet to formally define their positions. This report outlines a political and scenario mapping process that a team of consultants undertook on behalf of Forus to ensure that the network’s approach to the negotiation process remains relevant regardless of what the future holds. By analysing the three scenarios outlined above in detail, this report will help Forus stress test its must-haves (procedural and substantive), examining how participation, financing and accountability principles perform under different global trajectories, and prioritise key emerging trends that can shape the post-2030 framework discussions. In doing so, it clarifies an early-phase objective: to shape participation architecture and core negotiation parameters before formal talks begin in 2027. These findings will form the basis for further engagement with Forus’ membership and ultimately lead to the production of a Post-2030 Vision Paper that will guide the network’s engagement with the post-2030 process.

This report has been developed in December 2025 and January 2026 through a two-step process: 1) a desk review of 20+ sources related to debates around the post-2030 agenda and lessons from the SDG implementation and negotiation process; 2) key informant interviews with 12 diverse stakeholders from UN agencies, think tanks and civil society. A thematic analysis of data, alongside two one-hour sense-making sessions among the team of consultants has further helped synthesise and triangulate key findings.

The report begins by setting the scene of the current state of the post-2030 landscape, as a way of clarifying the starting point of each of the three scenarios. From this point, an exploration of each of the three scenarios is outlined: continuity, ambitious reset, and fragmentation. Each scenario section contains a short summary, an elaboration of the key dynamics at work, and an exploration of the role that civil society would conceivably play, as well as an assessment of the likelihood that the scenario will occur. The report concludes with a summary of the findings and the implications for Forus’ post-2030 vision.

Setting the scene

The global sustainable development landscape is entering a period of profound uncertainty and transformation. Debates around the post-2030 agenda are occurring in a fragmented and politically charged environment, shaped by deep systemic stresses and rapid technological change, as well as a broader reordering of global power and intensifying multipolar dynamics. Three interlinked dynamics define the present context: 1) shrinking civic space and democratic erosion, marked by increasing delegitimization, repressive policies and less inclusive high-level political processes; 2) funding contraction and uneven global solidarity, reflected not only in ODA pressures but also in rising debt burdens and a shift from grant-based cooperation toward loans, blended finance and more transactional “mutual investment” approaches; and 3) systemic volatility: planetary, technological and political. Today’s world is very different to the one in 2015 when the SDGs were first agreed, when the international environment was marked by more optimism and synergy around a common development agenda. The SDGs are now significantly off-track, accountability mechanisms such as Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) have often functioned more as showcase exercises than corrective tools, and participation in global negotiations has in several recent processes – such as the Summit for the Future - been more limited and tightly managed than during the original SDG negotiations.

While there is still a great deal that is unknown about how the post-2030 negotiations will unfold over the coming years, there are already several key factors that have emerged as determinants. These include: uncertainty about what US administration will be in place after negotiations begin in 2027 and to what extent it will support a global compact on development; the attitudes of other Member States, many of whom are facing upcoming key elections; and the status and capacity of the United Nations (UN), including the impact of the UN80 reform process, ongoing liquidity pressures, and the appointment of a new Secretary General (SG). In addition, regional political transitions —including elections in several of Forus’ member countries, leadership changes in regional bodies such as the African Union and ASEAN, and evolving positions within BRICS, the G20 and the G77 on development cooperation — will shape the negotiation landscape. For national platforms, understanding their own government’s trajectory and positioning will be critical, as well as to what extent they will be operating in open or restrictive civic environments. These factors have added to a current context that informants described as a “waiting game”, where negotiation stakeholders are watching how events unfold, hoping for more conducive negotiation conditions to be put in place. This pause, however, does not affect all actors equally. Delay may advantage those who prefer limited reform, weaker accountability mechanisms or more transactional financing models. At the same time, the absence of fixed positions creates space to shape the rules of the process (including participation architecture, civic space safeguards, accountability expectations and financing principles) before formal negotiations begin.

“I see a quiet 2027 Summit happening – the ‘whisper summit’. But this gives us more flexibility to manoeuvre into a more ambitious framework post 2029.”
Anonymous

Beyond geopolitical competition, the post-2030 debate is unfolding amid intensified political contestation over norms — including rights, gender equality, civic participation and environmental commitments. In several contexts, the 2030 Agenda has become a target of polarising ‘culture war’ narratives. This increases the risk that ‘continuity’ becomes dilution in practice, and that an ill-timed reopening of the framework could enable normative backsliding rather than renewal.

This context creates much uncertainty about how the post-2030 negotiations will transpire, which will be explored in more detail in the scenario sections of this report. The hesitancy to begin planning for the negotiation process until key unknowns are answered, however, also provides civil society – and Forus in particular – with an opportunity to influence the form, focus and overall direction that the talks may head in. This opportunity is tempered somewhat by the reality that, since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a trend of declining avenues for civil society participation in global governance negotiation processes, as elite policymakers have prioritised closed-off, more easily controlled processes. Informants, for example, contrasted the openness and inclusiveness of the SDG negotiation to the more closed and oblique process around the Summit

“Civil society in a different place from last time, [when it] was riding high in 2012. If civil society groups want to engage and have a role, they need to approach in a very different way. For my tastes, CSOs often worry too much about process and not enough on content. Governments won’t care about procedural things. Organisations will need to be more focused and targeted, and focused on outcomes.”

Claire Melamed

Vice President, AI and Digital Cooperation, United Nations Foundation

of the Future in 2024 and other similar UN-led arenas, where civil society was largely excluded from meaningful participation. Against this backdrop, additional structural pressures (including the increasing politicisation of development finance, institutional strain within the UN system, and digital governance as an emerging arena

of power affecting rights and inequality) further shape the environment in which post-2030 negotiations will unfold. The report will proceed to unpack these conditions and what they mean for Forus, across three plausible scenarios: continuity, ambitious reset, and fragmentation.

Key Political Arenas and Influence Points (2026–2027)

Although formal post-2030 negotiations will begin at the 2027 SDG Summit, the agenda is being shaped throughout 2026 across regional, thematic and institutional arenas.

Regional positioning throughout 2026

The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, held in February 2026 in Bangkok, provided an early indication of how governments in the region are positioning themselves on implementation, financing and localisation ahead of 2027. Similar dynamics are unfolding in other regional SDG review platforms, including:

- The Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for Latin America and the Caribbean (Santiago, April 13-16)
- The UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in Europe and Central Asia (Geneva, 21 – 22 April 2026)
- The Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (Addis Adaba, 28 – 30 April 2026).

These regional processes feed directly into the High-Level Political Forum and often shape bloc coordination. In practice, governments tend to define negotiation parameters domestically and regionally before articulating them in New York.

For civil society, these forums represent one of the most practical entry points for influence, particularly through engagement with national ministries as mandates are formed.

The 2026 global review and thematic cycle

The High-Level Political Forum in July 2026 serves as a political signal of where Member States are heading. While formally an annual SDG review, it is also a testing ground for narratives about extension, recalibration or limited ambition.

In parallel, major environmental negotiations are shaping the outer boundaries of any post-2030 framework. UNCCD COP17 in August 2026, the Biodiversity Conference in October 2026, and COP31 in November 2026 are advancing debates on drought governance, biodiversity implementation, climate ambition and loss and damage finance. Financing discussions within these arenas will directly affect the credibility and feasibility of future commitments.

Institutional reform and negotiation design

The presentation of the UN80 reform proposals in October 2026 is a critical institutional moment. Decisions taken here may influence participation modalities, Secretariat configuration and the broader balance between intergovernmental control and multi-stakeholder engagement before formal post-2030 negotiations begin.

2027: Science framing and political mandate

In 2027, three linked moments will consolidate the trajectory. The July High-Level Political Forum will provide a final political stocktake. The Global Sustainable Development Report in September 2027 will frame the science-policy narrative entering negotiations. The SDG Summit later that month will formally launch discussions on the post-2030 agenda and define their scope.

By that point, most core political positions will already be set.

Where civil society influence is most realistic

Influence is strongest before formal negotiations begin. The most practical leverage points are:

- Engaging governments during national and regional mandate formation
- Shaping participation and accountability modalities during UN80 discussions
- Linking financing debates across HLPF and climate and biodiversity processes to implementation credibility

In short, 2026 is the decisive year. The 2027 Summit will formalise a direction that is largely shaped in advance.

With the introduction and setting of the scene completed, the report now turns to its core substantive focus, that of detailing and exploring the various scenarios for the negotiations, and what they mean for Forus and other key stakeholders.

Scenario 1: Continuity

In short

A de facto SDG extension focused on implementation and financing, with few substantive changes.

A continuity scenario would extend the SDGs with targeted refinements rather than wholesale change. The focus would be on making goals more implementation-friendly and refreshing and refining goals to reflect major changes in global contexts. **In practice, however, continuity could also mean lowest-common-denominator adjustments that preserve the framework without shifting underlying power imbalances, finance or accountability.** Progress would depend on shoring up the financing architecture, including debt restructuring, improved lending terms for the Global South, and stronger domestic resource mobilisation. Continuity would also involve a renewed push on localisation, shifting power through multi-level governance, and greater use of technology as an enabler while managing its risks. Maintaining coherence would be essential, particularly resisting pressures to dilute environmental commitments in favour of short-term growth. Civil society could add value by focusing early on concrete outcomes and aligning around a small number of shared, credible demands, while avoiding purely cosmetic reform.

What it could look like

The continuity scenario for the post-2030 agenda would involve using the SDG framework as a starting point by building on the progress it has enabled, while refining, reforming or even removing aspects that have worked less well. In effect, this would acknowledge how the SDGs reframed development as a shared, universal endeavour, in contrast to the MDGs that arguably put the onus squarely on the Global South. It would also reflect a broad agreement among stakeholders that the SDGs' vision remains relevant and is a firm foundation to reopen discussions from. At the same time, continuity could equally reflect political caution, privileging stability over ambition, and result in incremental adjustments that avoid more difficult debates on financing, power asymmetries and enforcement. It is likely that negotiations would primarily focus on improvement of implementation and how substantive, thematic areas can be reframed to align with contemporary realities, though there is a risk such changes will remain procedural rather than transformative.

Improvements to implementation

There is a widespread acknowledgement that implementation of the ambitious SDG agenda has fallen short of expectations. According to the UN, as of late 2025, only 17% of SDGs were on track. Various criticisms have been made of the goals: a lack of prioritisation led to a bloated, unwieldy goal set; excessive indicators and reporting requirements led to an overly burdensome monitoring regime; and that the goals lack clear implementation pathways, resulting in a lack of tangible progress.

Under a continuity scenario, reform discussions would therefore focus on making the goals more implementation-friendly, including clearer articulation of how specific interventions contribute to intended outcomes. This could include adopting more explicit “pathways” approaches that cluster action around core systems to promote holistic strategies and accelerate progress, including human wellbeing and capabilities; sustainable and just economies; energy decarbonisation and access; food and nutrition systems; urban and peri-urban development; and global environmental commons.¹

“If I was in charge I’d make various changes – halve indicators, for example, and targets. And do in a way that is driven by evidence. 15 years of evidence. Can we look at which ones are best to use? Massively reduce reporting burden. What are targets that are having an impact, and which ones aren’t looked at? May not need as much negotiation also, which is helpful.”

Claire Melamed

Vice President, AI and Digital Cooperation,
United Nations Foundation

In addition, some informants stressed that negotiations could focus on a streamlining of indicators to focus on a smaller set of critical measures, as a way to address redundancy or underdeveloped indicators in the current framework. It is worth stressing, however, that conversely other informants stressed the need to strengthen the current indicator framework by addressing gaps. Regardless, hand in hand with such moves could be expectations for greater clarity around roles, responsibilities and accountability across different levels of governance to increase the prospects of follow through by member states. Some analysts believe a renewed emphasis on localisation could be central, particularly efforts to

strengthen multi-level governance arrangements and to shift power and decision-making closer to communities. For such shifts to be credible, meaningful civil society participation would be essential, alongside safeguards for civic space and safe engagement at national and local level. Strengthened reporting on progress could play a more substantive role in this regard, for example by making reporting obligatory across all goals for all Member States, while also formalising the role of civil society while strengthening accountability and learning.²

¹ <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/unsgs-report-proposes-building-on-six-transitions-to-realize-sdgs-by-2030/>

² https://www.forus-international.org/en/extra/hub/resources-publications?modal_page=pdf&modal_detail_id=a-decade-of-accountability-assessing-the-role-of-voluntary-national-reviews-in-advancing-the-sustainable-development-goals

Tweaks to focus

Another area of focus may be updating the SDGs to be more suited to contemporary challenges. Several informants referred to the possibility that there could be a move to place a greater emphasis on technology as an enabler of progress across multiple goals, alongside greater attention to mitigating the risks and externalities of emerging technologies such as AI, including related to the climate crisis, misinformation, mental health and civic space.

“In terms of thematic issues, the Global Sustainable Development Report [has] been trying to find entry points and linkages to focus on that can provide interlinkages for accelerating progress towards SDGs. These are still useful points to push in advocacy.”

Lynn Wagner

Senior Director, International Environmental Governance Program, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Efforts to promote coherence among goals could also feature on the negotiation agenda, in order to minimise trade-offs and maximise multiplier effects between the three spheres of society, environment and economy. For example, several informants spoke of the prospect of a concerted effort by governments and private actors to water down environmental commitments to “boost growth”. However, others – including environmental groups and states with strong commitment to climate action - will likely reject this in favour of a more sustainable approach. Another example that surfaced in interviews was how short-term economic imperatives can impact social priorities, such as in the reduction of education funding in Pakistan during a period of austerity.

While efforts to rationalise the existing framework are widely expected by analysts, it is difficult to envisage significant goals being removed. The inclusion of a wide range of priorities was a central political compromise in 2015, and similar dynamics are likely to prevail in this scenario, potentially sparking renewed debate about prioritisation.

Financing

It will be in financing where perhaps the toughest negotiations will take place within a continuity scenario. Regardless of the outcome of the negotiations, several informants spoke clearly about the need for a better and more predictable development financing infrastructure to underscore any agreement. In particular, they noted how a range of G20 and major creditor/donor countries have advocated for debt restructuring and improving the terms of loans for countries in the Global South.

In parallel, informants raised the prospect that several Member States are likely to place further emphasis on cultivating and enabling domestic and local financing options, including increased tax revenues, improved public financial management, and better leveraging of remittances and private capital in support of sustainable development objectives. At the same time, a renewed commitment to complementary international development financing mechanisms and instruments will be essential to ensure sustained progress on key global priorities, despite growing nationalistic sentiments and the prioritisation of domestic spending.

Institutional dynamics

Under a continuity scenario, member states would remain firmly in the driving seat, with the process largely shaped through intergovernmental negotiations and established UN mechanisms. Traditional supporters of the SDG agenda in the Global North would continue to play prominent roles, although their leadership may be uneven given domestic political dynamics, including recent reductions in official development assistance (ODA) and the rise of the far-right in several countries. Global South countries, while prominent already during the SDG negotiations, are likely to play even more of a substantive, leadership role this time. At the same time, some states have signalled a willingness to step in as conveners, with Japan, for example, already indicating its intention to play a leadership role in post-2030 discussions.³

³ <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/sdgs/vnr/vnr2025en.html>

Compared to 2015, emerging powers are likely to be more influential in shaping the contours of a framework. They will bring distinct priorities and expectations, particularly around development finance, policy space, and the balance between national sovereignty and global commitments. Managing these dynamics will be critical to maintaining consensus around a continuity pathway. Multiple informants expected several middle-income countries that played leading roles in the SDG negotiations, such as Colombia, Brazil or Mexico, to likely remain significant players as long as domestic political dynamics allow.

Stakeholders also highlighted the potential for stronger alignment between the new SD agenda and other global and regional frameworks, such as the Paris Agreement and related climate agreements or the African Union's Agenda 2063, many of which were still being developed during the SDG negotiations. Some analysts have even floated extending the next framework to 20 years to align with the 2050 zero emissions goal.⁴ Several respondents echoed that this a reasonable timeframe for being able to see and measure progress on a new framework inspired by the SDGs, given their aspirational nature, and mainstream reporting across various frameworks. This approach could help reinforce coherence across the international system and strengthen implementation by linking the SDGs more explicitly to existing accountability and delivery mechanisms.

Role of Forus and civil society

In a continuity scenario, several informants raised the view that civil society's influence is likely to be greatest if it finds the right advocacy balance between pushing for both an inclusive negotiation process and a substantive final framework. For Forus specifically, this requires using its networked structure to translate national experience into coordinated global positioning — systematically drawing insights from members and feeding them into emerging post-2030 discussions before formal positions solidify. This includes articulating clear positions on what must change to make the SDGs more effective in practice, particularly in relation to implementation, financing and accountability, focusing on big asks that can drive meaningful change. At an early stage, Forus could prioritise shaping the rules of engagement — advocating for robust participation modalities, clear safeguards for civic space, credible review and accountability arrangements, and principled approaches to financing that reflect implementation realities across contexts. At the same time, civil society has an important role to play in pushing for greater transparency and inclusivity in the negotiation process, while ensuring that marginalised groups are not sidelined. Forus' added value lies in activating its regional and national platforms to influence debates in capitals and regional arenas, not solely at UN headquarters, ensuring that domestic policy experience informs multilateral positioning.

"[There is a need to] take stock of what is working, why and where - start now, so you can document and make a case and create connections between processes and actions that can make a difference in-development and collective wellbeing. Gather, evidence, map what is there and works well and scale it up, and develop a narrative - this should be the basis at legislative and policy level."

Sebastien Vauzelle

*Head of the Local2030 Coalition
Secretariat*

There is also scope for civil society networks to lead more explicit reflection on the SDG experience to date: what has worked, what has not and what should be done differently in an extended framework. Forus is well positioned to coordinate a structured review across its membership — identifying effective practices, analysing enabling conditions, and building a shared narrative that links practical results to future policy design. A staggered advocacy approach would be effective: emphasise influencing the inclusivity of the process initially, before more fully focusing on the substance of the framework once negotiations begin in 2027. Substantial influencing work can be done informally at national level in the lead-up to 2027, especially in countries that are committed to the development agenda and can point to successful areas of implementation (for example, Japan, Indonesia, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Colombia and European Union countries). By aligning member messaging early and

⁴ Beyond 2030: structures for achieving sustainable development, Tom Cernev and Richard Fenner, Frontiers in Climate, 16 Oct 2024

connecting domestic implementation lessons to forthcoming negotiation debates, Forus can help shape both procedural norms and substantive priorities before they become fixed. In addition, some respondents pointed towards the critical role civil society can play in rebuilding public trust in a shared, global commitment with a leave no one behind approach, while mobilising youth and the next generation as key drivers and stakeholders for this vision.

Despite these opportunities, it is important to note that civil society is likely to enter the post-2030 process in a weakened position compared to the SDG negotiations, as funding cuts have affected both advocacy and implementation capacity. Forus, in particular, is therefore well positioned to act as a convening and amplifying voice for its membership, or even the broader sector. This could include establishing one or two clear, shared priorities early in the process and deepening them over time, drawing on the legitimacy and access of its network to speak credibly on localisation, civic space and inclusive governance. Working in coalition with other civil society actors and articulating common positions will be essential. Finally, civil society should be prepared to defend the SDGs as a valuable foundation for global cooperation, while being candid about their shortcomings, should also be a central part of civil society's contribution. Important work is needed to strengthen global support – that of national governments as well as the general public - for continued commitment to multilateralism and global solidarity, and a renewed development agenda. Civil society actors have the tools and legitimacy to support this effort.

SWOT analysis of Forus' ability to influence process in a continuity scenario.

Strengths Credibility from long-term engagement with SDG development and implementation processes Global members' network has advocacy access at national / regional level Research and advocacy work on SDG implementation highly relevant to a continuity scenario A UN led process is predictable, with clear entry points for influencing - Forus already has the know-how and external network to navigate the process, leveraging existing advocacy capacities National and regional membership gives legitimacy on localization and speaking to on-the-ground realities.	Weaknesses Funding cuts have decimated NGO capacity for both advocacy and program implementation Forus lacks advocacy presence at UN level in NY where negotiations likely to take place Forus' access to the process depends on UN institutions and national/regional members' existing relationship with national Governments and regional bodies Pushing for improvements rather than transformation may be demobilising or less appealing for parts of the membership, especially where SDGs are seen as having failed communities and local organizations.
Opportunities Reduced CSO capacity opens-up for leadership opportunities for remaining, credible actors with global reach like Forus Space to be propositional on shaping negotiation process in period before it formally begins in 2027, providing grounded, evidence-based inputs	Threats Longer-term trend of more closed UN processes with less room for CSO involvement could continue (tokenistic or procedural only participation for CSOs) Lack of commitment by long-term development supporters and traditional donors reduces appetite for addressing shortcoming of SDGs

Coalition-building with like-minded CSO networks, and other actors such as municipalities and progressive private sector actors, to pool and channel resources, strengthening collective civil society voice Members' national and regional programming can be leveraged to define key asks and identify areas of change, especially in financing, accountability and participation Space to rally citizens as understanding of development goals has grown since 2015.	Decrease in trust and buy in from actors in G77 and BRICS countries, limiting Forus and its related members in these countries to influence processes in certain countries/regions Continuity could result in an extended framework with limited commitment for implementation, weak accountability and no meaningful shifts in power or financing, reducing the value of sustained CSO engagement.
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Prospects

The continuity scenario emerged as the perhaps most plausible scenario during the research phase for this report and appears to be how many key stakeholders are currently imagining the process unfolding, despite the volatile global climate. There is a sense that the SDG framework is a good basis to build from, that its goals are still relevant, and that its extension - with relevant changes and refinement - is an achievable diplomatic outcome. At the same time, other stakeholders noted that shifting to a fundamentally different agreement would be counter-productive, not least considering the time and energy invested by state- and non-state actors - from local to national level - in integrating SDGs in relevant processes, and the fact that this has provided one of the most inclusive spaces for other stakeholders to engage. While not perfect, it is a system “we have all learned how to navigate and can further improve”, as one informant put it.

The shifting geopolitical context, however, does present challenges for reaching a follow-up agreement to the SDGs, and there are inherent pitfalls in this scenario. It is plausible that an agreement could be reached but without unanimity or without firm commitments on implementation, or that countries withdraw support after the fact. Alternatively, continuity may simply mean extending the time period by another 15-20 years for the existing framework, with no other changes being agreed.

Scenario 2: Fragmentation

In short

A negotiation process hamstrung by competing regional blocs, a lack of agreement on common values, and a marginalised civil society.

A fragmentation scenario would see the post-2030 moment shaped less by collective ambition and more by shifting geopolitics. Growing assertiveness from emerging powers, heightened sensitivity to Western dominance in global forums, and political change in major capitals could prevent agreement on a single global framework. Fragmentation might mean no new UN-led compact at all, accompanied by sharp reductions in financial commitments. However, cooperation could reconfigure around regional and thematic forums—such as the African Union, ASEAN, the EU, or climate and food alliances—while existing global agreements, including COP processes, function as de facto frameworks. In this context, civil society could play a critical role in maintaining accountability and coherence, even as development risks becoming a geopolitical instrument of influence.

What it could look like

The fragmentation scenario would entail the negotiation process breaking down under the weight of the various complicating factors that this report has already outlined. In effect, fragmentation could mean there is no global agreement at all, with no consensus found about whether the SDGs can be extended or an alternative framework established in their place. Alternatively, fragmentation could also take the form of a thin, face-saving declaration with minimal new commitments, or a procedurally agreed extension that lacks political and public buy-in and substantive ambition. In this sense, fragmentation need not be absolute; it may instead manifest as a hollowed-out or weakly implemented compact.

Fragmentation would almost certainly lead to further drastic reductions in financial commitments to global development, exacerbating existing funding gaps and placing additional strain on already fragile development financing systems. Interviewees stressed that civil society would struggle to bridge this funding gap and that through alternative mechanisms such as regional cooperation, new bilateral arrangements or non-traditional sources of finance would likely become increasingly needed.

A failure to reach agreement would also likely be perceived as a significant blow to multilateralism, reinforcing narratives about the erosion of the liberal international order.

At the same time, fragmentation does not necessarily equate to the absence of cooperation. In some respects, a shift away from a single global framework toward regional or thematic approaches could be seen as a more pragmatic response to geopolitical realities. Regional forums such as the African Union (AU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the European Union (EU) could assume greater prominence, tailoring development priorities more closely to regional contexts and political economies.

“Fragmentation isn’t the worst thing in the world – regionalisation could be the best way to achieve [the existing goals].”

Anonymous

Moreover, it could plausibly be argued that a range of existing global commitments – such as those emerging from COP processes on climate change, biodiversity agreements, global health initiatives or the human rights frameworks and institutions – could function as a de facto global framework in the absence of a unifying UN-led compact. Under this

scenario, coherence would be looser and more uneven, but global action would continue through overlapping, issue-specific commitments rather than a single, comprehensive agenda.

Institutional dynamics

As with the ambitious reset scenario, the role of emerging powers and alternative blocs, most notably BRICS, would be central to the dynamics of fragmentation, alongside political developments in key traditional powers such as the US.

A further politicisation of the development agenda could occur as the post-2030 vision is treated as a geopolitical football rather than a shared global project. Large powers could attempt to take hold of the process to exert greater influence, promoting their own priorities and norms. For example, one informant raised the possibility that China could advance a unilateral or bloc-aligned set of development goals and encourage countries that it exerts political or economic influence over to adopt them. Meanwhile, several informants raised the likelihood that the US could look to advance a “back to basics” agenda focused mostly on peace and security, at the expense of more long-term development objectives. Others warned that actors such as the BRICS countries or the Gulf States could seek to water down rights-based language in any final agreement as a pre-condition to contributing additional resources to a new global compact.⁵ In practice, this could take the form of broad, non-binding reaffirmations of human rights framed as “non-politicised” and respectful of national sovereignty, as seen in the BRICS

⁵ BRICS Expansion and the Future of World Order: Perspectives from Member States, Partners, and Aspirants, Patrick et al, 2025; Policy Brief: Gulf Philanthropy and International Development, Khoory, 2025.

Johannesburg Declaration 2024.⁶ It could also include stronger emphasis on non-interference and domestic policy space over universal accountability standards,⁷ and development cooperation language centred on mutual benefit and national priorities rather than enforceable civil and political rights commitments.⁸ The manner in which other stakeholders, including the remaining Western powers, respond to these disparate possibilities would likely be significant in deciding whether negotiations lead to a breakdown of consensus (fragmentation) or the forging of an entirely new one (ambitious reset).

The assertiveness of emerging powers is underpinned by a growing perception that many global institutions and negotiation spaces remain biased toward Western priorities and contexts, which could increase prospects for a fragmentation scenario. One illustrative example can be seen in debates on data governance, where multilateral organisations such as the UN, OECD and the World Bank have tended to prioritise issues of concern to advanced economies, including privacy standards, interoperability, and sophisticated digital governance frameworks. However, many developing countries continue to grapple with more foundational challenges, including data collection capacity, digital infrastructure and basic administrative systems.⁹ Such imbalances risk reinforcing disengagement from global processes perceived as misaligned with national realities.

Looking further ahead, the absence of a unifying global agreement would likely accelerate the emergence of what many informants describe as “coalitions of the willing”, through which specific priorities are advanced outside universal frameworks or through existing, independent governance systems (COP). Regional organisations such as the AU, ASEAN and the EU would become increasingly important sites for coordination, alongside thematic alliances focused on specific issues, such as food security or hunger. At the same time, fragmentation could elevate the role of non-state actors, particularly in fast-moving policy domains such as digital technology. In the absence of clear global governance, corporate actors and international businesses may become more influential in shaping norms and practices and filling policy vacuums, but also in raising new questions about accountability, inclusion and public oversight.

Role of Forus and civil society

In a fragmentation scenario, civil society’s role would be critical as signs emerge that consensus around a global framework is weakening. Rather than disengaging, civil society networks such as Forus would play an important role in salvaging what can be preserved from the SDG architecture, including core principles such as universality, inclusion, accountability and a commitment to leaving no one behind. This could involve advocating for partial agreements, political declarations or minimum common standards that prevent a complete collapse of shared ambition.

Alongside efforts to stabilise negotiations, there would be a growing need to prepare for alternative pathways, including a more regionally driven or thematic approach to global development cooperation. Forus and its members could play an important role in helping to map what such a landscape might look like in practice and in identifying “coalitions of the willing” in which member states, regional forums and issue-based alliances are best positioned to carry forward elements of the development agenda.

Civil society would also be central to shaping the narrative around fragmentation as negotiations unfold. Proactive communication and advocacy would be required to attempt to bring negotiations back on track, or to ensure that an eventual partial failure or stalled negotiations are not framed as the end of multilateralism, but rather as a period of transition and reconfiguration. In doing so, civil society could help maintain political space for a future agreement.

⁶ BRICS Joint Statement on “Strengthen BRICS Solidarity and Cooperation, Respond to New Features and Challenges in International Situation” (https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zy/gb/202405/t20240531_11367458.html)

⁷ BRICS and Human Rights: Issues, Implications, and Impact Scenarios Under Expansion, Ahmed A. Khalifa and Zainab Fathy, CIHR, 2024

⁸ Gulf Donors and the 2030 Agenda: Towards a Khaleeji Mode of Development Cooperation, Dr. M. Evren Tok, UNU, 2015.

⁹ *Promoting Genuine Inclusion in Multilateral Discussions on Digitalisation*, Andrea Cabello in *The Next Frontier: Charting the Contours of the Post-2030 Development Agenda* (Reliance Foundation and Observer Research Foundation, 2024).

If fragmentation occurs, Forus could act as a connector and sense-maker for its membership, supporting civil society actors to navigate uncertainty, align strategies across regions and maintain pressure on governments throughout the negotiation process. This would position civil society not only as a reactive actor in the event of breakdown, but as an active force shaping both the endgame of negotiations and the pathways that could follow.

SWOT analysis of Forus' ability to influence process in a fragmentation scenario

Strengths Forus has credibility and global reach to rally CSOs both during and after negotiations in case of fragmentation scenario Regional and national reach of Forus' membership positions it to identify "coalitions of the willing" and advocate for more localised development agendas Forus' decentralized structure allows for flexibility and adaptability to pivot between different forums and entry points as global negotiations stall Given its strong rights focus, Forus is best positioned to continue upholding inclusion, accountability and "leaving no one behind" principles in the alternative governance fora emerging (thematic or regional).	Weaknesses Lack of CSO capacity limits ability to influence and steer negotiations back on track if they begin to break down Relative failure to achieve SDGs by 2030 could reduce appetite for a renewed agenda Depending on the breadth of fragmentation, Forus and other CSOs might have less leverage to engage and influence the negotiation process On a regional fragmentation track, Forus' ability to maintain a shared vision and common narrative for all members might be impacted Uncertainty and a perceived failure of the global system could weaken member commitment and drive to remain engaged in advocacy efforts.
Opportunities Breakdown of global negotiations could lead to opportunities to salvage more tailored frameworks at a regional or thematic level A less ambitious framework to replace SDGs focused on more achievable, "low-hanging fruit" targets could focus efforts in the shorter term, and in the longer term renew enthusiasm for a global development agenda, if successfully met Forus can provide a space of connecting and redefining added value for its members in a complex landscape and increased divergence across the aid sector Depending on level of fragmentation, core development and rights-based ambitions can still be retained in alternative frameworks	Threats Further constraining of financial contexts for civil society would likely occur, potentially leading to reduced cooperation Rights-based / leave no-one behind approaches unlikely to continue, leading to a less universal and inclusive development agenda Question marks of formalised roles for CSOs in negotiations process / future development agenda if fragmentation occurs, especially in currently repressing contexts Desired substance changes might not materialize, being replaced only by tokenistic power leadership changes (i.e. existing power holders simply being replaced by emerging ones without a bottom-up reform of the system) - Forus' influence being limited with certain actors

Civil society can provide an alternative accountability mechanism if existing multilateral mechanisms lose legitimacy (i.e. UN)	Development may be further politicized, becoming a transaction tool in wider geopolitical interests, limiting Forus’ ability to drive change in key rights-based areas (equality, gender etc).
A less North-driven arena can lead to new forms of regional and South-South cooperation, more aligned with priorities they perceive as critical	
More pragmatic, narrow approach to development objectives could allow for efforts to be channelled towards tangible change in fewer but more impactful areas.	

Prospects

The fragmentation scenario was deemed the second most plausible of the three scenarios explored for this report. The current geopolitical context is such that several informants believed it was conceivable that talks break down entirely and that no agreement can be reached.

A further and related possibility that several informants raised was that a combination of the continuity and fragmentation scenarios could emerge, in which a highly volatile and fragile negotiation process culminates in a very loose or “fudged” agreement. In this version of events, the potential catastrophe of full fragmentation would be averted, but the final agreement would largely be face-saving and toothless, unable to genuinely promote a concerted international development agenda.

As noted above, while the fragmentation scenario does not necessarily need to lead to a wholly negative outcome, interviewees overall mainly stressed pitfalls and risks under this scenario.

Scenario 3: Ambitious Reset

In short

An ambitious pathway that seeks to reimagine and take a fresh approach to development, going beyond the existing SDG framework.

An ambitious reset scenario would view the 2030 deadline not as an end, but as a politically contingent inflection point to rethink the foundations of global development cooperation. It would move beyond the 17-goal structure towards a new framework shaped by contemporary poly-crisis realities, such as climate stability, inequality and digital governance. This approach could shift the emphasis from narrow poverty targets toward a broader conception of shared well-being, resilience and regenerative economic models, while potentially reopening debates around rights-based frameworks and development norms in the hope of forging a new consensus. Governance would evolve either within UN intergovernmental constraints or through parallel coalitions (e.g. G20-led or plurilateral processes), with greater roles for emerging powers, regional bodies and multi-level actors alongside states. For civil society, this scenario offers the greatest scope to shape a new agenda, but would require careful coalition-building, political realism and clarity about whether change is pursued inside, alongside, or beyond the UN system.

What it could look like

An ambitious reset scenario would be heavily informed by a recognition that the SDGs will not have succeeded to the extent that its proponents may have hoped. As noted above, just 17% of the SDG targets are currently on track.¹⁰ Moreover, as noted above, the geopolitical context surrounding the next phase of negotiations is notably different to the one that marked the final period of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Not only is the world facing several interlocking crises, but the global diplomatic arena has also changed substantially with the emergence of new powers and alliances, while traditional aid models and the so-called rules-based world order, and global institutions more broadly, are being challenged. There is therefore a strong case to be made for going back to the drawing board on a sustainable development framework that mirrors public priorities for the future and different North/South narratives for collective success.

“A reset framework first requires a reset UN.”

Anonymous

An ambitious reset would not emerge in the abstract but would likely be driven by a specific political coalition or catalytic moment. This could include a reform-minded G20 presidency, coordinated positioning by a bloc such as the G77 or an expanded BRICS grouping, leadership initiatives tied to the UN Secretary-General’s reform agenda (such as Our Common Agenda and UN80),¹¹ or a major systemic shock, such as a climate-related disaster or financial crisis, that shifts the political calculus. Absent such drivers, appetite for wholesale reconfiguration within the UN system would likely remain limited.

An ambitious reset could conceivably be pursued along three broad, interlinked lines: a new policy prospectus informed by a refreshed global consensus; a complete transformation of the entire development apparatus; or a remaking of the financial architecture underpinning the aid agenda.

Across these lines, change could unfold either within the constraints of UN intergovernmental negotiations or through parallel processes operating alongside the UN architecture. Any reset pursued within the UN would remain subject to consensus rules, sovereignty sensitivities and bloc politics,¹² limiting the scope for wholesale institutional redesign. By contrast, more ambitious or structural shifts could be driven in parallel or outside formal UN frameworks — for example, through G20-led financial reform processes¹³ or plurilateral agreements on climate, health or digital governance that may not require full UNGA consensus,¹⁴ potentially feeding back into the UN process or evolving alongside it.

A new policy prospectus

Given the increased significance of non-Western powers, and the pressure that the liberal consensus has come under in recent years, it is possible that new paradigms may shape the post-2030 negotiation process.

Recent years have seen countries such as India and Brazil adopt more assertive positions in global forums, such as during their respective tenures in the G20 presidency.¹⁵ For example, India helped anchor consensus on tripling global renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency by 2030, secured the AU’s permanent membership in the G20, and proposed a global platform to recognise and share Indigenous and traditional knowledge within international policymaking. Brazil, meanwhile,

¹⁰ UN General Assembly; Second Committee, 79th Session, 10th and 11th Meetings, 2024 (<https://press.un.org/en/2024/gaef3604.doc.htm>)

¹¹ Our Common Agenda (<https://www.unonline.org/en/common-agenda.html>)

¹² How Decisions are Made at the UN (<https://www.un.org/ar/node/44727>)

¹³ Boosting G20 cooperation for WTO reform: Leveraging the full potential of plurilateral initiatives (<https://www.global-solutions-initiative.org/publication/boosting-g20-cooperation-for-wto-reform-leveraging-the-full-potential-of-plurilateral-initiatives/>)

¹⁴ Business Standard: G-20 nations agree to push for reform of global governance institutions (https://www.business-standard.com/world-news/g-20-nations-agree-to-push-for-reform-of-global-governance-institutions-124092100245_1.html)

¹⁵ IDOS Discussion Paper: The European Union’s Global Role in a Changing World Challenges and Opportunities for the New Leadership, Hackenesch et al (eds.), 2024

launched the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty and led a collective call for reform of major global institutions, including advocacy on taxing extreme wealth. Such examples signal a greater willingness among a wider range of actors to challenge existing norms and to propose alternative – and at times more ambitious – approaches to global cooperation.¹⁶

If negotiations move away from a continuity scenario but are to avert breaking down altogether, one potential outcome is the creation of a new framework explicitly designed for contemporary poly-crisis, with a stronger emphasis on human security, systemic risk and resilience.¹⁷ The rationale for this would be that the increased volatility engulfing the world requires an entirely new framework to shape the global response, and could conceivably win support from disparate groups of states in both the Global North and South affected by, for example, conflict or the climate crisis. Along similar lines, some theorists have argued in favour of a new global settlement to be reached on what human flourishing means, and how it should be pursued collectively.¹⁸ They believe that a framework more suited to contemporary challenges would more explicitly incorporate non-material conditions such as cultural, psycho-social and community-based aspects of development. While by no means guaranteed, opening up the debate in this way could, in turn, create political space for greater buy-in from non-Western actors such as the Gulf States or BRICS countries, who – as noted earlier – are increasingly averse to the existing rights-based paradigm.

“On climate, language can be strengthened. During SDG process, there was a feeling that we couldn’t pre-empt the Paris Process negotiations that were ongoing at the time, so not included in SDGs. This time, there is a chance to do something more robust. Goal 15 has now been superseded by biodiversity framework. All goals have different deadlines – some have talked about the new goals being [aimed at] 2050 to align with [the net] zero emissions [target].”

Lynn Wagner

Senior Director, International Environmental Governance Program, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Alternatively, stakeholders could begin to coalesce around a single strategic issue that resonates with a broad enough set of actors from both the Global North and Global South. For example, one informant speculated that this could be related to global health or the climate crisis. In the case of the latter, this would be a means of deepening commitments made through the 2015 Paris Agreement and subsequent COP summits from a development perspective. The logic would be to focus on issues with strong multiplier effects, where progress in one domain generates “positive cascades” or tipping points across a wider set of development priorities.

Transforming the aid apparatus

Another avenue, raised by multiple informants, was that an ambitious reset could emerge in the form of a bold push from civil society to reinvigorate multilateralism as a vehicle for advancing global development. Rather than solely focusing on reframing the objectives of global development, this sub-scenario would involve shifting the discourse towards a clearer articulation of the purpose of the UN and wider multilateral system, reflecting serious doubts about its capacity to meet mounting global challenges and the shortcomings of the UN80 process.¹⁹ Alternatively, but along similar lines, another informant raised the prospect of global governance moving beyond the UN to an entirely new approach based on regional bodies. Although there are many remaining questions about the specifics of these pathways, mounting frustration with the current multilateral system is likely to heighten demands – from national governments and the general public alike – for reforms aimed at improving legitimacy, representation, and responsiveness.

A further, related transformation is a fundamental shift away from a framework that relies on overly target-based language of goals and indicators. One informant spoke about how this current approach is insufficient to the task of complex development

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ *ibid*; OECD Strategic Foresight Toolkit for Resilient Public Policy, 2025

¹⁸ Human flourishing: An integrated systems approach to development post 2030, Earth System Governance 23, Zwitter et al, 2025

¹⁹ Damien Lily, “One Compact Too Far: UN80 and the Humanitarian Reform Malaise”, IPI Global Observatory, 2025.

work, while a shift away from such an approach is also known to be supported by Gulf States.²⁰ Reforms along these lines would imply moving away from narrowly defined, time-bound targets toward approaches that emphasise shared values, continuous progress and adaptive pathways, while still retaining sufficient structure to support accountability and coordination. A challenge in such a framework, however, would be how to ensure accountability in a transparent and equal manner.

Financing

Given the consensus that the financial architecture underpinning the global development agenda is increasingly under strain, while resources to meet existing goals have been drastically scaled back, another reset possibility is a new framework for international public finance. A financial reset would be an attempt to reinvigorate the global financial architecture in a way that is conducive to a broader reimagining of how the world pursues development as a collective endeavour. Resetting the financial architecture would likely entail the tackling of several issues that have been consistently raised by Global South Member States and sympathetic wealthy nations, including debt architecture reform, special drawing rights (SDR), climate finance alignment, tax cooperation, the tackling of illicit flows, and greater financial transparency.

However, beyond these specific issues, there is also the possibility of reimagining financial aid in its entirety.

One such example has been put forward by the analyst Jonathan Glennie, who has argued for a new Global Public Investment (GPI) Framework centred on universality, ongoing action (e.g. not fixed to specific end goal targets) and democratic governance.²¹ GPI would do away with the donor/recipient dynamic in international development featuring the Global North as the overwhelming centre of power, and be a step further towards acknowledging development as a shared global project.

Under an ambitious reset scenario, such approaches could gain traction as both a practical response to declining aid budgets and a political response to demands for a more equitable and inclusive global financial system.

Institutional dynamics

The prospects of an ambitious reset scenario are heavily dependent on geopolitical power dynamics, including the role of emerging powers and alternative blocs such as BRICS, the Gulf States and G77, as well as shifting priorities for traditional development supporters, including but not limited to the US, depending on how national politics evolve.

These approaches or the actors behind them, however, do not necessarily represent a threat to the overall global development agenda. Rather, it will be key to ensure that the negotiation process is inclusive and pragmatic enough to accommodate a broad range of opinions, without losing focus of its ultimate goal. It is also important to keep in mind that emerging blocs such as the BRICS or G77 are far from homogenous but contain members representing a broad spectrum of attitudes to development. At the same time, there remains a clear risk that attempts to pursue an ambitious reset could themselves accelerate prospects of fragmentation, particularly if negotiations become polarised or if expectations about the scope and ambition of reform diverge too sharply.

²⁰ BRICS Expansion and the Future of World Order: Perspectives from Member States, Partners, and Aspirants, Patrick et al, 2025

²¹ The birth of global public investment Mutual interest and mutuality in 21st century international public finance, Global Cooperation Institute, Glennie, 2005.

Role of Forus and civil society

As noted above, civil society has a window of opportunity to influence the post-2030 process and should be propositional before formal negotiations begin, including by promoting a more bottom-up process that could open-up for a more transformative agenda. There are, however, significant question marks about what this could look like in practice, as well as scepticism about how an overly ambitious endeavour would line up with global diplomatic realities or national development agendas. Indeed, the interviews conducted for the purpose of this study underscored that, while there is broad support for the sentiment behind the localisation agenda, there are question marks about this could be meaningfully operationalised in high-level, mostly state-led global negotiations, with little room for sub-national voices. Several stakeholders, however, noted the national and grassroots reach of Forus and its members makes it uniquely well-positioned to highlight local voices on the global stage.

More broadly, Forus is also well-positioned to be propositional in setting the agenda for a potential reset, should the membership opt for this route. A position put forward by Forus could be focused on fundamentally remaking the global development agenda along one of the lines outlined above. More pragmatically, Forus could also forge a new consensus around one specific issue or a narrow set of issues, including by putting forward proposals for what these priority issues should be.

This could include proactive engagement with reform-minded actors within emerging power blocs, alongside efforts to articulate how localisation and civil society participation could be strengthened even within predominantly intergovernmental processes.

SWOT analysis of Forus' ability to influence process in an ambitious reset scenario

Strengths Legitimacy imbued by large, global membership of civil society organisations gives Forus strength Forus' links to national platforms and grassroots CSOs provides the grounds to articulate alternative visions of development rooted in lived experience A reset scenario requires broad coalitions across regions, themes and movements—an area where Forus has comparative advantage CSOs have more credibility and legitimacy to question existing aid paradigms and power imbalances, core to the reset scenario.	Weaknesses Comparatively weak position of global civil society vs. when talks took place in 2015 The reset scenario requires strong political leadership in framing a new operational framework CSOs can engage in, compared to the current SDG that builds on decades of institutionalizing development Will require CSOs to advocate in many different places at the same time, without common UN framework.
Opportunities Develop deeper understanding of emerging powers' and alternative blocs' development priorities and areas of potential alignment or consensus Develop a clear picture of what a more participatory, bottom-up negotiation process could look like	Threats Possibility of Forus precipitating a loss of what was gained through the SDG framework by pushing too hard for something bolder which many may see as incongruous to contemporary capacities and appetites of nation states Without the political leadership to drive a systemic change to match the ambition, this scenario can lead into fragmentation - Forus' pushing the

Opportunity to redefine development success on terms that bridge the North-South divide, present a new and inclusive vision of sustainable flourishing, and open new thematic alliances Cross-sector collaboration can expand beyond traditional development actors on themes like climate, digital rights and social inclusion This scenario requires the largest governance shift - creating an arena for CSOs being propositional about participation and accountability.	ambition can lead to a volatile process with uncertain results Fundamental renegotiations of global norms can undermine progress on rights-based commitments, core to Forus' current work Forus network will weaken as members become more focused on their own regions.
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Prospects

Of the three scenarios, the ambitious reset scenario was deemed the least likely of those explored for this report, for several reasons. Firstly, a feeling of “negotiation fatigue” has set in across much of the international system, with limited appetite among governments for embarking on another major, open-ended global negotiation process.

Secondly, there is little evidence at present of strong political demand for a comprehensive reset, and it would likely require a monumental shift in popular support to generate sufficient momentum. This raises questions about whether, and how, civil society could play a role in generating such demand, if it was even advisable. If a reset were to materialise in this way, it would likely be more bottom-up in nature, driven by localisation, participation and public mobilisation, with CSOs playing a key role in convening as well as channelling and amplifying key positions upwards.

Thirdly, some analysts emphasised the inherent risk in starting negotiations on a fundamentally new framework at a moment when the legitimacy of the UN is contested and global consensus appears weaker than when the SDGs were agreed. The end result could be a framework that hollows out many of the principles and targets enshrined in the SDGs, risking a slide towards the fragmentation scenario rather than something more ambitious and progressive.

However, one possible avenue in which a reset opportunity may arise could be if consensus around a continuity framework weakens or breaks down. This is particularly the case if emerging actors become more vocal in their demands, including resistance to rights-based approaches or a push for a more narrowly defined, “back to basics” agenda. While this on the face of it is an ominous prospect, it could conceivably also provide an opportunity for reimagining a more transformative framework.

Alternatively, another global crisis on the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic could also trigger calls for an ambitious reset and renewed commitment for a global framework and multilateralism. In this case, a window of opportunity could be created in which a reset becomes less a matter of choice and more a matter of necessity, forcing a reconsideration of existing frameworks and institutional arrangements.

Alternative or hybrid scenarios

As has been noted above, the scenarios explored are not mutually exclusive and may evolve in hybrid forms, a dynamic reflected consistently across both the literature review and stakeholder consultations. Several informants described the likelihood of “partial continuity” — where formal agreement on the post-2030 architecture is reached, but political commitment varies in depth and implementation, with some Member States engaging only selectively or translating commitments unevenly into practice. Others noted that continuity at the level of a negotiated text could mask divergence in financing approaches, progress tracking or civic space conditions, creating fragmentation beneath an intact multilateral framework. At the same time,

some contributors suggested that a continuity pathway could incorporate more ambitious strands of reset thinking — for example, stronger formal guarantees for civil society participation alongside bolder collective positioning on climate ambition or global health cooperation — without fundamentally redesigning the institutional architecture. Interviewees also stressed that reform-oriented “reset” dynamics depend on sustained cross-bloc alignment; where this alignment weakens, contested debates around debt, accountability, or enforcement can quickly harden into fragmentation. Taken together, both the consultations and the materials reviewed suggest that an ambitious reset and fragmentation represent different expressions of the same structural pressures, with outcomes shaped less by formal agreement alone than by the depth of political buy-in and follow-through.

“A powerful scenario could be the Pact [of the Future] being the agreement. Building coalitions of the willing for SDG2.0, [in] more ambitious sets than an overall pact.”

Nudhara Yusuf

Co-Chair Coalition for the UN We Need

Conclusion

This report has outlined the findings from a strategic foresight process which has sought to identify and delve deeper into three plausible scenarios for the post-2030 negotiation process to agree a successor framework to the SDGs. It has furthermore set out to assess what these scenarios mean for Forus and broader civil society engagement with the process and will serve as the basis for further consultation with the Forus membership.

The report makes clear that the post-2030 negotiations will take place in much changed global environment to when the SDGs were developed, with fundamental impact for civil society engagement. The process will unfold in a world defined by deeper geopolitical fragmentation, constrained public finances, accelerating climate and technological risks, and growing scepticism toward multilateral institutions. While this report identifies a continuity pathway as the most plausible outcome, it is far from guaranteed, and both fragmentation and partial or uneven outcomes remain credible risks.

For Forus and wider civil society, the central strategic challenge will be to navigate this uncertainty without becoming paralysed by it. The analysis suggests that, to remain influential, Forus should not tie itself to a single assumed outcome but rather adopt a flexible strategy that is resilient across scenarios. This includes defending the core principles embedded in the SDGs—universality, inclusion, accountability and leaving no one behind—while being candid about their shortcomings and open to reform.

The following practical implications emerge:

- **Shape the process early.** Engage before 2027 to influence participation architecture, civic space safeguards and accountability parameters, when procedural rules are still fluid.
- **Focus on a small number of high-impact priorities.** Concentrate advocacy around financing reform, meaningful participation, and power shifting to local levels, rather than dispersing efforts too broadly.
- **Build cross-scenario resilience.** Prepare strategies that remain relevant under continuity, thin agreements or fragmentation, ensuring that core principles are defended even in constrained environments.

- **Leverage the network strategically.** Use National Platforms and Regional Coalitions to gather evidence, track political signals in capitals and regional bodies, and translate these into coordinated global positioning.
- **Invest in narrative and coalition-building.** Help sustain public and political support for equitable, accountable global cooperation by articulating clear, credible and grounded alternatives.

Ultimately, the post-2030 process will be as much about politics and power as it is about policy design. Whether negotiations lead to an extension, a reconfiguration or a more fragmented landscape, civil society can play a critical role in shaping narratives, maintaining pressure for equity and ambition and sustaining public support for global cooperation. Forus is well placed to contribute to this effort—not by betting on a single future, but by preparing to act strategically across many possible ones. A Stress-Test Matrix on Annex I (on the proceeding page) is one tool that can contribute to that process.

Annex I - Stress-Test Matrix

Criteria	Continuity	Fragmentation	Ambitious Reset
1. Participation & Civic Space	• Formal but procedural CSO role maintained within established negotiation formats • Civic space narrower than 2015 but operational in most multilateral settings • Participation shaped by funding constraints and increasing selectivity in access	• No formalised or consistent CSO role across negotiating blocs • Civic space increasingly shaped by national political restrictions and funding volatility • Engagement opportunities vary significantly by geopolitical alignment	• Formal and expanded CSO role in negotiations, contingent on sustained Member State buy-in • Renewed funding flows and capacity investments where political leadership aligns • Elevated expectations among civil society that may be difficult to maintain in volatile geopolitical conditions
2. Accountability & Reporting	• VNR model retained with incremental procedural refinements • Continued reliance on voluntary reporting with limited movement toward enforcement • Political energy around accountability fluctuates, affecting consistency of follow-up	• Reporting frameworks diverge across blocs, reducing comparability • Voluntary approaches persist without shared incentives or harmonised standards • Parallel or competing accountability mechanisms emerge	• Reform momentum around review architecture and strengthened follow-up, dependent on cross-bloc convergence • Movement toward more structured incentives beyond purely voluntary reporting • Potential for uneven uptake across blocs if consensus on enforcement modalities proves elusive
3. Financing / Means of Implementation	• Debt and IFA reform remain on the agenda but advance incrementally • ODA commitments rhetorically reaffirmed yet constrained by domestic fiscal pressures • Innovative financing discussions continue without structural shifts in global financial governance	• Debt pressures dominate national fiscal agendas, limiting collective ambition • ODA flows increasingly aligned with geopolitical partnerships rather than multilateral coherence • Limited appetite for coordinated IFA reform across major power blocs	• Political opening for systemic IFA and debt reform where reform coalitions hold • Increased traction for global public investment and equity-linked financing narratives • Financing negotiations likely to become a central arena of geopolitical contestation, shaping pace and depth of reform
4. Localisation / Power Shifting	• Continued rhetorical commitment to localisation principles • Multi-level governance referenced in outcome documents but unevenly implemented • Fiscal decentralisation	• National governments retain centralised control over SDG implementation pathways • Subnational actors' decision-space varies widely and is often politically contingent	• Institutionalisation of multi-level governance where national governments actively enable devolution • Expanded fiscal and decision-making space for subnational actors in supportive political contexts

	progresses selectively, dependent on national political will	• Local financing mechanisms remain underdeveloped or externally driven	• Localisation progress uneven across countries, reflecting divergent national political economies
5. Forus Leverage Points	• Use early post-2030 reflection space to shape process reforms and embed priority policy asks before positions harden • Strengthen regional coalitions within existing negotiation frameworks • Advance accountability and civic space language within negotiated continuity frameworks, including efforts to strengthen reporting obligations of member states.	• Anchor core participation and equity principles during short agenda-setting windows before blocs consolidate • Operate as a cross-bloc bridge through flexible coalition alliances. • Prioritise protection of civic space through coalition solidarity.	• Capitalise on reform momentum to shape both negotiation design and substantive architecture from the outset • Position Forus as a structured thought leader while political appetite for change is elevated • Sustain cross-regional alliances to prevent reform momentum from dissipating after peak moments.

Annex II - Methodology

Composition of Consultation Group

The consultation group was comprised of 13 individuals across four stakeholder categories:

- UN System (5) – Senior officials and mandate-holders working on SDG follow-up and review, financing and debt dynamics (including Africa-focused processes), localisation, and civic space.
- Think Tanks / Policy Institutes (5) – Experts in multilateral reform, sustainability governance, and data and measurement politics shaping global policy debates.
- Civil Society / NGO Networks (2) – Leaders from global SDG coalition and UN advocacy networks with cross-regional engagement experience.
- Philanthropy (1) – A senior representative of a major global foundation providing insight into donor strategy and financing trends.

The experts were diverse and globally representative along geographic and gender lines, working within global governance processes.

Ethical considerations

All interviews were conducted in line with a clear ethical protocol grounded in informed consent and a do-no-harm approach. Participants received information about the purpose and use of the research in advance and provided consent prior to interviews commencing. Interviewees were offered the option to contribute anonymously or off-record, and all attributed quotations were double-checked with explicit permission secured before publication; where permission was not granted or was later withdrawn, contributions have been included anonymously. Interviews were scheduled at times convenient to participants, with particular care taken to ensure that engagement did not create risks for those operating in politically restricted or fragile contexts. Sensitive information has been treated confidentially and stored securely, with ethics and accessibility embedded throughout the process.

Secondary Sources Consulted

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