

A REGIONAL COMMISSION SHOULD NOT SET INTERNATIONAL PPP STANDARDS

CSO FfD GROUP LETTER TO CHALLENGE THE CURRENT ATTEMPTS BY UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (UNECE) TO DEFINE INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS ON PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (PPPs)

March 2016

We, members of the CSO Financing for Development (FfD) Group (including the Women's Working Group on FfD)¹, object to the work currently taking place at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to generate international public-private partnership (PPP) standards. We believe this important global policy framework should not be decided by a regional economic commission, even with participation by other UN Member States and constituencies. Decisions on international standards can only be legitimately taken within global, democratic and inclusive intergovernmental settings – where all countries have an equal seat at the table – and with the meaningful participation of civil society. The FfD Follow-up Forum would thus be the most suitable locus for this process to legitimately take place.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have repeatedly challenged the current bias in promoting the PPP model as a modality for development implementation in many different global and sectoral policy processes, including those leading up to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) on FfD. In particular, CSOs have exposed the increasing evidence that shows that PPPs change the nature of public services and investments, worsen the fiscal problems against which they are offered as solutions, expose fundamental faults in transparency and democratic accountability, and provide less efficient and more costly operations than they claim. PPPs also contribute to fostering development implementation strategies that socialise costs and privatise gains to the exclusive benefit of the corporate sector.² All of the aforementioned have impacted negatively on women's lives in particular.

Concerns regarding the uncritical promotion of PPPs are not limited to CSOs, as evidenced by the 2015 Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education³ and the latest UN DESA Working Paper on PPPs⁴. The latter states that: *"(...) evidence suggests that PPPs have often tended to be more expensive than the alternative of public procurement while in a number of instances they have failed to deliver the envisaged gains in quality of service provision, including its efficiency, coverage and development impact."*

Recognising the complexity of the matter, UN Member States committed *"(...) to holding inclusive, open and transparent discussion when developing and adopting guidelines and documentation for the use of public-private partnerships (...)"* in the Third International Conference on FfD (paragraph 48 of the AAAA).

It is therefore unacceptable that UNECE *"(...) working with international partners, is elaborating international standards and recommendations for policy makers especially in developing countries and transition economies, on how to use PPPs to achieve the SDGs."*⁵ We call on UN Member States to immediately stop this encroachment by UNECE over global policy-setting, and restore democratic and participatory processes in advancing much-needed definitions of international standards and guidelines on PPPs to ensure the primacy of human rights for all persons and the pursuit of public interest over corporate profit.

¹ For more information about the CSO FfD Group, see here: <https://csoforffd.wordpress.com/about/>

² Among others, the following reports offer clear evidence to support the argument:

Eurodad (2015), "What lies beneath?" available [here](#); Jubilee Debt Campaign (2015), "Tanzania hit by costs of public-private partnerships," available [here](#); PSI (2015), "Why public-private partnerships don't work," available [here](#); Oxfam (2014), "A dangerous diversion," available [here](#).

³ http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/342

⁴ http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2016/wp148_2016.pdf

⁵ http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/ceci/documents/2016/PPP/Forum_PPP-SDGs/Information_Notice_UNECE_PPP_Forum.pdf