The AfDB holds its first ever CSO Open Day in the Kingdom of Eswatini

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The African Development Bank RDGS Office in collaboration with the National Coordinating Assembly of NGOs (CANGO) held, the first of its kind, a CSO Open Day in the Kingdom of Eswatini on May 21, 2019. The event was attended by Government representatives and more than 45 participants, mostly CEOs, drawn from various civil society organisations that operate in the country. The Open Day was designed to create awareness on the Bank's operations and interventions in the country; receive feedback on the projects funded by the Bank, and discuss modalities of enhancing engagement between the Bank and CSOs as key stakeholders in the achievement of the country's development priorities as stipulated in their new 5-year National Development Plan (NDP), as well as the Bank's High 5s.

The specific objectives of the Open Day were to; Disseminate information on the Bank's Country Strategy and status of the investment portfolio in Eswatini; Share updates on CSO footprint in Eswatini, their areas of focus and how that relates/links to the Bank Projects; Explore opportunities and areas of collaboration in the implementation of the Bank's operations; Document lessons learnt and best practices in relation to the Banks operations in the country

Through presentations and open discussions, participants were able to define the context within which they are operating, focusing on some of the key challenges that they face in the execution of their activities, while making concrete proposals on some of the existing opportunities that the Bank can look into with a view to improving the quality the services to the people it serves through the various implementing partners, including Government and private sector.

The event's keynote speaker was the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, Mr. Bheki Bhembe. In his keynote address, the PS acknowledged the important role that CSOs play in development. He reiterated Government's commitment to working with the civil society sector to deliver the new 5-Year National Development Plan. He commended CANGO for their continued engagement with Government and appreciated the fact that the Bank was seeking to strengthen its engagement with CSOs and the private sectors in the country.

In his speech, Mr Emmanuel Ndlangamandla, the Executive Director of CANGO gave a brief background of how CSOs started operating in the Kingdom from as early as the 1930s. He said that most local and national CSOs were started by citizens who identified development gaps, and that the sector had grown diverse to include Community based organisations, Trade Unions, Faith-based organisations, NGOs etc. He emphasized that the role of CSOs was to, beyond providing the much-needed services to communities, raise consciousness of the Government, using evidence and practical solutions/alternatives. He emphasized that accountability from all stakeholders was paramount. The requirement for accountability did not only rest with the Government, but that there was a growing demand for NGO accountability to the communities that they serve, in addition to the Government and their donors. He highlighted one of the key challenges that NGOs are facing was the lack of a national regulatory framework, and that CANGO was in discussions with the Ministry of Home Affairs on the subject matter.

Key Recommendations

- Put in place an NGO regulatory framework that is all inclusive and will coordinate NGOs in the countries, and create an enabling environment for CSO operations in a transparent and accountable manner (NGO involvement and input into the framework will be critical for ownership)
- Seek ways of enhancing the capacity of indigenous NGOs/CBOs whose capacity is very low and makes the society fragile
- The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho to involve CSOs in policy spaces and dialogue with a view to ensuring community voices and aspirations are captured and inform policy setting
- Ensure effective participation of communities and CSOs in the Bank's operations and projects
- Need to prioritise climate change and its impact on food security in the policy dialogue with all the stakeholders
- Promote PPPs in the Kingdom
- Support and strengthen the capacity of the private sector in the country as it is weak at the moment
- The Bank's new CSP for Eswatini should have a bottom-up approach and emphasis be paid to some of the key micro-economic needs of the country
- That the engagement between the Bank and CSOs be on an on-going basis; explore opportunities for capacity building and funding opportunities moving forward.