Engaging Civil Society in Building Resilient Economies in Post Covid-19

Report of the 1st Virtual Regional Civil Society Forums

ENGAGEMENT AVEC LA SOCIÉTÉ CIVILE
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GROUPE DE LA BANQUE AFRICAINE
DE DÉVELOPPEMENT
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ACRONYMS

AFAWA	Affirmative Finance Action for Women
AfDB	Africa Development Bank
AfCTA	African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement
ADF	African Development Fund
AFRICAN-WIB	African Women in Business
AWIBI	African Women in Business Investments Limited
AIDS	Auto Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AU-AFDB-GCA	African Adaptation Acceleration Summit
BREFONS	Building Resilience in Food and Nutrition Security
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CAMFED	Africa For the Campaign for Female Education
CSE	Civil Society Engagement
CODE	Cooperative Development Environment
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CR	Consumer Reports
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DBDM	Development Business Delivery Model
EAC	East African Community
PAFO	Pan African Farmers' Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus

IDEV	Independent Evaluation Department
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOP	Indicative Operational Programme
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSISA	Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa
PIDA	Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa
PPP	Public Private Partnerships
RDGE	East African Regional Office
REC	Regional Economic Community
REFAC	Réseau des Femmes Actives d'Afrique Centrale
RDGN	Regional Office Northern Africa
RI	Regional Integration
RISF	Regional Integration Strategic Framework
RISP-NA	Regional Integration Strategy Paper (RISP) – North Africa
RISP	Regional Integration Strategy Paper
RMC	Regional Member Countries
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SMMEs	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises
TAAT	Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation
UMA	Union of the Maghreb
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refuges
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

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INTRODUCTION

Background and context

The Africa Development Bank (AfDB) organised five regional forums across the continent in lieu of the Annual Bank Civil Society Forum. This was a major innovation of the 2021 Civil Society Forum, based on feedback from previous forums and as one of the main recommendations of the Capitalisation Study on 10 years of the Bank's Annual CSO Forums. The Bank's recent history has been marked by a number of major developments, including the design of the Development and Business Delivery Model (DBDM) whose objective is to streamline the Bank's management processes for increased efficiency, financial performance and development impact. This is expected to bring its operations closer to its clients while improving service delivery. The Forums provided an opportunity for the Bank to share its regional vision and priority areas that inform its operations, and to explore key opportunities for strengthening civil society engagement at the regional level.

Participants

The Forum drew over eight hundred participants from national and regional CSO actors, the AfDB Civil Society Committee members, regional non state organisations and relevant sectors of the Bank. The CSOs involved covered a diversity of sectors and issues, including trade and investment, governance, climate change, gender and social inclusion, vulnerable groups, human rights, agriculture and humanitarian work, among others.

Objectives of the Regional Forums

The initiative is in alignment with the aim of the Bank to consult and engage further with the broader civil society community and, the Bank's Civil Society Committee. The regional CSO Forums aimed to:

- Provide a platform for presenting an overview of Bank's Regional Integration Strategy Papers (RISPs) orientations and Civil Society Engagement (CSE) in the region;
- Deliberate on the chosen theme(s), focusing on challenges and existing opportunities on CSE to enhance the relevance, impact, and quality of Bank operations; and
- Identifying concrete areas in which the Bank can en gage with CSOs in the regions.

CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE OF THE FORUMS

The Regional Forums are aligned with the Bank's President call on the occasion of the 2020 Civil Society Forum for a transition from a process-based to a results driven engagement with achievable programmes involving civil society organisations. Regional Forums represent a platform for an inclusive, more participatory and results-based engagement of civil society.

One of the conclusions of civil society engagement with the Bank's processes and operations as indicated by the Independent Evaluation Department (IDEV) shows that such engagement is not highly sustained by the Bank's country and regional offices. IDEV recommended specific corporate arrangements to facilitate policy dialogue between the Bank, CSOs, governments and other stakeholders. Another IDEV evaluation discusses the relationship between the civil society forums and the CSO Committee, an advisory body whose role is to guide the Bank's engagement towards building more robust relationships and partnerships with civil society. Regional Forums will help to curb these policy dialogue deficiencies at the regional level, while reinforcing the role of CSO committees so that they can fully get involved in the preparation and organisation of forums as well as in the follow-up of their recommendations.

The Regional Forum themes were closely aligned to that of the Bank's 2021 Annual Meeting, namely "Engaging civil society in building resilient economies in post COVID-19 Africa" with the overall goal being to enhance stakeholder engagement at the regional level. Each region determined its most relevant themes, highlighting existing challenges and opportunities with a view to enhance civil society engagement in order to improve the impact and quality of Bank operations. It is expected that the main recommendations, conclusions and concrete commitments of these regional forums will be the subject of a follow-up and implementation plan.

The Regional Forums were structured to foster interactive sessions between the Bank Staff and CSOs including the AfDB-CSO Committee Members and other non-state regional organisations. Overall, the forums were moderated by senior Bank staff and panel sessions and roundtable discussions were facilitated by both Bank staff and civil society experts and leaders. Key Bank staff made presentations on each Regional Integration Strategy Paper for the five regions and contributed to the thematic and technical sessions alongside civil society leaders.

SUMMARY OF SUBSTANTIVE PRESENTATIONS AND KEY MESSAGES

Central African Region

On Tuesday, 26 October 2021, the Central Africa's Regional Civil Society Forum was convened under the theme "The role of civil society in the participation of women and youths in the post-COVID-19 building process in Central Africa". The Forum brought together about one hundred of CSOs from seven countries of the region, namely: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon.

Welcome remarks were made by Mr Solomane Koné, the AfDB Deputy General Manager for Central Africa and Zeneb Toure- Manager, Civil Society and Community Engagement Division. This was followed the presentation of Central Africa's RISP by Solomane Koné, and a roundtable discussion led by Danielle Nlate, President, Réseau des Femmes Actives d'Afrique Centrale (REFAC) and Christian Moussavou representing the youth.

Following the first roundtable, Youssouf Koné, Coordinator, Regional integration, Central Africa made a presentation and Eunice Tata, President of NKUMU FED FED (non-governmental organisation), Cameroon presented a case study on a project on the vocational training and economic empowerment of conflict-affected women and girls in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon. The ensuing discussions focused mainly on post-COVID resilience building in the sub-region through the promotion of regional infrastructure connectivity and the strengthening of trade and investments. Thereafter, recommendations were adopted and presented by Mr Robert Mabala, regional representative in the Bank-Civil Society Committee, with monitoring of their implementation due to be discussed at the next regional forum in 2023. Solomon Kone made the closing remarks for the Forum.

The following key action points emerged from this Forum :

- CSOs and the representative of the Bank-Civil Society Committee for Central Africa should work together in order to enhance regional participation to the 2022 world CSO forum.
- Ensure the involvement of civil society stakeholders in the design of country strategy papers 2022–2023 for the sub-region.
- Organise at least four sessions of open houses in 2022–2023 in order to better inform civil society about the Bank's operations in regional member countries.
- Organise sessions to build CSO capacity on the Bank's initiatives AFAWA and "Jobs for Youth in Africa" in the sub-region.
- Build the capacities of local CSOs on the Bank's policies and operations.

North Africa Region

The Civil Society Regional Forum for Northern Africa was convened under the theme "Role of Civil Society in Enhancing Regional Integration for Inclusive Post Covid-19 Building in North Africa" on 16 November, 2021. The theme was based on the two pillars of the Regional Integration Strategy Paper (RISP-North Africa) 2020-2026, namely (i) Integrating North Africa through the promotion of regional infrastructure connectivity; and (ii) Strengthening intra- and inter-regional trade and investments through the promotion of the private sector.

The opening remarks were made by Abdou Diaw, Division manager in charge of operational support, on behalf of Mohamed El Azizi, the Bank's Director-General for North Africa. Luther Yaméogo, representing Zeneb Touré, Manager of the Civil Society and Community Engagement Division of the African Development Bank also made opening remarks. This session was followed by a presentation on the as well as the Bank's corporate arrangements for civil society engagement.

The first roundtable discussion had Basma Soudani, Director, Political Affairs, Union of the Arab Maghreb (UMA), Amine Bouhassane, President of Think Tank Initiatives for the Maghreb's Economic Community, Tunisia and Ahmed Chehbouni, President of Centre de Développement de la Région de Tensift (CDRT), Morocco. In the first technical session, Rafika Amira, Coordinator, Regional Integration (RDGN) presented the RISP and Edward Nsobe, the Capacity building and Civil Society Cooperation Officer, AfDB, presented the Bank's corporate arrangements for civil society engagement.

The following key action points emerged from this Forum:

- Work with CSOs and the representative of the Bank-Civil Society Committee for North Africa in order to enhance regional participation to the Continental CSO Forum, 2022.
- Ensure the involvement of civil society stakeholders in the design of country strategy papers 2022-2023 for the sub-region
- Organises at least four sessions of open houses in 2022-2023 in order to better inform civil society about the Bank's operations in regional member countries.
- Organise consultations on social and environmental safeguards with civil society in the sub-region by the second quarter of 2022.

Southern Africa Region

The Civil Society Regional Forum for Southern Africa was convened under the theme 'Engaging Civil Society in Building Resilient Economies in Post COVID-19 Africa' on November 24, 2021. The Forum was moderated by Ndoli Kalumiya, Senior Country Economist, RDGS. The Forum was attended by 160 CSO participants from the Southern African countries of Eswatini, Namibia, South Africa, Botswana, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Angola and Zambia.

The welcome address was made by Kennedy Mbekeani, Deputy Director General, Regional Office for Southern Africa, while Zeneb Toure- Manager, Civil Society and Community Engagement Division made the welcome remarks and a Goodwill message was delivered by Maria Mulindi, Director-Special Programmes, Office of the President.

The main elements of Southern Africa's Regional Integration Strategy Paper, 2020-2026 were elaborated by Bokang Mokati-Sunkutu, Coordinator RDGS. A high level Panel on the theme "Enhancing Women's Resilience; Challenges and Opportunities" was facilitated by Linet Miriti-Otieno, Principal Gender Specialist, RDGS, Dr Shungu Gwarinda, Graca Machel Trust (CSO Committee Member) and Prisca Soko, African Women in Business. A case study was presented Joel Bizure-World Vision, Zimbabwe on 'CSO participation in the implementation of a Bank funded project in the region (Key Achievements and Lessons)'.

Two more thematic sessions were held under the theme 'Role of Civil Society in building back better post COVID 19 through skills development of Human Capital and Jobs for Youth ' by Angie Murimirwa, Africa for the Campaign for Female Education and 'Role of CSOs in Promoting Post-COVID-19 Governance and Accountability in the Region' by Velaphi Mamba, OSISA. The presentation on 'The Bank's Role in supporting CSO Engagement in Promoting Trade and Investments in the SADC Region was made by Lufeyo Banda, Chief Regional Operations Officer, AfDB.

The following key action points emerged from this Forum:

- The Bank can play a role in boosting capacity building for CSOs. This could be sector based so that CSOs in relevant sectors meaningfully contribute to the quality of the Bank's operations and to the implementation of the Bank's regional strategies.
- Greater involvement of CSOs in the Bank's Operations (Projects) should be promoted; Specifically in the CSP/RISP development and review processes. CSOs can support safeguard measures in the Bank operations. Where applicable, CSOs should be integrated in some of the Bank Projects as implementing partners.
- Targeted resources should be set aside for CSO engagement and support by the Bank.
- Continued support and engagement with CSO Committee Members is important for enhancing outreach, mobilisation and awareness creation of the Bank's activities on a regular basis. Open Days should be supported as platforms for engaging CSOs at the National Level.

East Africa Region

The Civil Society Regional Forum for East Africa was convened under the theme 'Engaging Civil Society in Building Resilient Economies in Post COVID-19 Africa' on 30 November, 2021. The Forum proceedings were moderated by Mr Alain Pierre Mbonampeka. The Forum was attended by 205 CSO participants from Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and South Sudan.

Introductory remarks were made by Zeneb Toure, the Division Manager, Civil Society and Community Engagement Division and Nnenna Nwabufo, Director General, RDGE. Goodwill messages were conveyed by Masheti Mashingila, the CSO Committee Member representing East Africa and Maria Mulindi, Director Special Programmes, Office of the President.

After a short video On the Bank's engagement with Civil Society, the Chief Regional Economist, RDGE Mr Temesgen Tilahun, made a presentation on the region's Regional Integration Strategy Paper (RISP).

Following the official opening, the discussions were structured into two substantive sessions and themes. The first one was titled 'From Debt Resolution to Growth: The Role of CSOs in Addressing East Africa's Rising Debt level. Facilitated by Mr Edward Senoga, it had three panelists presenting: Mutemi Wa Kiama, Gilbert Musinguzi of Uganda Debt Network and Jacob Oduor, AfDB Chief Country Economist, Tanzania. The second panel discussion was on 'The role of CSOs boosting Women's Empowerment in Agricultural Value chain development'.

The following key action points emerged from this Forum:

- Involve CSOs in accountability mechanisms through regional initiatives with the country offices. It is important for CSOs and the Bank representatives work together to foster regional preparations for the 2022 Global CSOs Forum.
- The participation of civil society actors in the process of preparing country strategy papers in the region should be ensured. The Bank has scheduled for 2022 to 2023 to organise Open Days to better inform CSOs about the Bank's operations in regional member countries.
- Organise CSO capacity building sessions on the AFAWA initiatives and innovations on any other relevant priority themes of the Bank in regional member countries.

West Africa Region

The Civil Society Regional Forum for Western Africa was convened under the theme "Accelerating physical regional integration in West Africa through Bank-Civil Society joint efforts, for a better post-COVID-19 building process in the sub-region" on 8 December 2021. The Forum was attended by 200 participants including civil society representatives, the Bank's staff and other non-governmental stakeholders of West Africa.

Welcome remarks were made at the opening session by Mr Joseph Ribeiro, the AfDB Deputy Director-General for West Africa and Ms Zeneb Touré, manager of the Civil Society and Community Engagement Division (AfDB). After these remarks, the first roundtable on the presentation of the West Africa's Regional Integration Strategy Paper (RISP-WA) 2020–2025 was presented by Mr Ometere Omoluabi-Davies, Coordinator, Regional Integration (RDNG) and Samba Kamara, Chief Regional Programme Officer (RDGW).

Thereafter, panelists Jean-François Yao, Principal Advisor in charge of Institutional Partnerships, CICR, Elizabeth Nsimadala, Pan African Farmers' Organization (PAFO), Cheick Omar Atieyiguibou, AFRIYAN, Tambu Ndoro, Graça Machel Trust and Sibusiso Nkomo, Afrobarometer, made their contributions to the Forum discussions. The discussions focused on civil society's contribution to accelerating regional integration and building resilient economies after the pandemic through interventions in top-priority areas such as the humanitarian sector, gender, youth, agriculture, and governance.

The following key action points emerged from this Forum:

- Multiply consultation and interaction occasions between the Bank's country offices and civil society in the sub-region, notably open days.
- CSOs and the Bank-CSO Committee representatives have to cooperate in order to encourage the countries of the sub-region to participate in the 2022 global CSO forum as well as in the mid-term review of the RISP-WA (also scheduled for 2022).
- National and international CSOs should mobilise their expertise for the Bank's operations for increased community mobilisation, awareness and consultation for more resilience.
- Specific consultations to be organised for the youths that are tailored for their meaningful participation and free from political pressure.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The process of convening and holding actual forums faced a few challenges, many of which could not be avoided, given the virtual nature of the virtual meetings, but there is room for improvement. The regional forums provided invaluable insights into and the deficiencies that need to be taken into account in future collaborations.

CSOs' capacity and engagement

Despite the great number of registrations, many CSOs could not take part in the virtual Forums. This may be attributable to fatigue resulting from participation in virtual meetings. Also, some CSOs complained of lacking the means to get connected for the duration of the forum. Some CSOs who had confirmed their attendance finally gave up when they realized they would not be reimbursed for the costs incurred. Others simply lack the required capacity to effectively engage on the technicalities of the themes and issues discussed during the session. Often, CSOs during the dialogue sessions preferred asking questions on AHGC.2 work rather than the Bank's operations as presented by the Bank staff. This revealed a SCOs were short of information and could inform specific knowledge building sessions to be hosted ahead of future regional forums.

Time management during the sessions of Regional Forums was problematic for some CSOs and the Bank's staff. This pointed to the need to better organize high-level panel discussions.

Participation

Mobilization of CSOs through their CSO representatives and umbrella organizations was useful not only for drawing a larger number of participants, but also for working with their elected leaders, the AfDB-CSO Committee Members. By shaping the Forum agenda, content and expected outcomes of the Regional Forums together with CSO Committee members, the Bank can ensure their commitment for collaboration over the outcomes and take advantage of increased relevance of the forums' content Forums for CSOs from a regional perspective. The initiative of sharing a Google document helped to reinforce participation as more CSOs were able to pass across information relevant to the Forum rather than vying to take the floor while time for conversation was limited.

Mobilization modalities

Given the successful mobilization CSOs and the Bank's personnel, it appears that the Bank's country office staff worked hard and showed proof of commitment when organizing the event. Most regional directors are also committed to enhancing CSE in their regions, as it becomes necessary to capitalize on such an initiative. However, the involved Bank staff members did not all show the same commitment intensity. Collaboration between Bank's Headquarters and regional teams generated ideas for organizing other events, but the actual logistics and leg work is still left to the CSO Officer. Organizing an event on a regional scale is time-consuming.

To optimize the participation, engagement and mobilization of all stakeholders for future Regional Forums, the following improvements are proposed.

Enhancing CSO participation:

- The availability of documents translated into all main official languages of the continent is key to broaden accessibility and participation.
- A hybrid system where participation in the forum is both in-person and virtual will boost participation.

- For the Regional Forums to effectively contribute to regional dialogue in line with BDEV's recommendation, CSOs need to be better and regularly informed about the regional portfolio, including challenges and opportunities for strengthening regional integration with the support of civil society.
- The scope of the sessions should be adjusted to allow for fewer and more succinct presentations.

Improving the involvement of Country and regional offices:

- There is need for better engagement of the Bank's staff to ensure their ownership of the emerging discussions and action points in the Regional Forums.
- For more effective and inclusive organization of the forums, it is essential to establish a task team at the level of the regional office to coordinate and oversee the preparation of the forums.
- AHGC2 and Regional Offices should work to ensure that relevant Bank's departments and units of the Bank (e.g. those in charge of youth, women's economic empowerment, infrastructure, energy) take the lead in planning and organizing thematic discussions in their fields during the forums.
- It is important to ensure that Country Managers participate in the forums.
- To ensure effective ownership, Regional Offices need to include and budget for the organization of regional forums in their workplans for the years the Forums shall be taking place.
- It is necessary to include quantitative and qualitative indicators on the Regional Forums in the monitoring and evaluation tracking system for CSE.

CONCLUSION

The First Virtual Regional Forums are considered successful for a number of reasons. Over 650 participants were able to attend the sessions from all 5 African regions. The Regional Forums promoted intra-regional dialogues on an unprecedented scale, fostering frank, productive and action-oriented exchanges among the Bank's staff and CSOs. Moreover, the hybrid format of the events enabled a number of CSOs that would have not been able to attend a physical Forum due to time and cost to participate actively, including through the use of chatrooms.

The Regional Forums also facilitated a sharing of challenges, good/best practices and a diversity of experiences and perspectives among Africa's civil society thought leaders and the Bank's staff. Commitments from the President of the AfDB on CSOs' involvement and their expectations of the Bank's role in a current and post-COVID Africa were intensively communicated. CSOs also emphasized the need to increase ongoing interactions and information sharing between regional forums, which will give them the opportunity to keep supporting the Bank's critical work in Africa. The CSO Committee members' interactions with their constituencies boosted their understanding of the key regional actors and issues, and this bodes well for continued advocacy and information sharing around the Bank's High 5s to all concerned stakeholders.



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