REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM NORTH AFRICA

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«Role of Civil Society in Enhancing Regional Integration for Inclusive Post Covid-19 Building in **NORTH AFRICA**»

GROUPE DE LA BANQUE AFRICAINE
DE DÉVELOPPEMENT
AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP

November 16th, **2021**

ACRONYMS

AfDB	African Development Bank
RISF	Regional Integration Strategic Framework
RISP-NA	Regional Integration Strategy Paper (RISP) – North Africa
CSP	Country Strategic Paper
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
UMA	Union of the Arab Maghreb

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION 6

Context and Rationale 6

Regional Approach 6

OPENING SESSION 7

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION 8

Overview of Discussions and Panellists 8

Key Messages 9

TECHNICAL SESSIONS 10

Overview of Presentations 10

Summary of Discussions 10

PATHWAYS 12

CONCLUSION 13

Summary of the Session 13

Way Forward 13

INTRODUCTION

Context and Rationale

On Tuesday, 16 November 2021, the African Development Bank Group ("AfDB" or the "Bank") organized the first edition of Regional North Africa Civil Society Forum. The theme was, **"The role of civil society in enhancing regional integration for inclusive post-COVID-19 building in North Africa".** This theme is based on the two pillars of the Regional Integration Strategy Paper (RISP-NA) 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. Held virtually, the forum brought together participants from civil society organizations operating in North Africa and the Union of the Arab Maghreb (UMA), and other non-governmental entities of the region.

Regional Approach

Based on both the feedback from the previous fora and consultations with civil society entities, regional fora are organized in the five African regions in 2021 before the annual forum 2022. The themes of regional fora are aligned with that of the Bank's 2021 Annual Meetings, namely **"Engaging civil society in rebuilding resilient economies in post-Covid-19 Africa"**.

The rationale behind these fora is that 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.

Moreover, regional fora are aligned with the AfDB President call—on the occasion of the Civil Society Forum 2020—for a transition from a process-based commitment to a results-based commitment, with achievable programmes involving civil society organizations. Regional fora represent a convenient platform for an inclusive, more participatory and results-based engagement of civil society.

More importantly, 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 lowly sustained by the Bank's country and regional offices. IDEV recommends 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 organizations' forum 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 fora 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 organization of fora as well as in the follow-up of their recommendations.

During the forum, the Bank's experts took the floor one after another in order to present regional integration strategy paper for North Africa 2020-2026, as well as the Bank's corporate arrangements for civil society engagement. Their presentations were followed by a panel discussion that allowed to representatives of the Bank, civil society organizations and UMA to compare their knowledge and try to seek a common ground for viewpoints.

OPENING SESSION



In the absence of Mr Mohamed El Azizi, the Bank's Director-General for North Africa, the opening speech was read by Mr Abdou Diaw, division manager in charge of operational support. He welcomed all participants to the first edition of the regional civil society forum organized in North Africa and highlighted that the relationship between the African Development Bank and civil society has increasingly grown over the past years. The Bank regularly consults with civil society in relation to the Bank's sectoral strategies, finance instruments and economic and sector analyses, he said. Mr Diaw called on different stakeholders to promote synergy and complementarity in order to improve regional integration in North Africa, through the promotion of regional infrastructure connectivity and inter- and intra-regional trade and investment.

In his opening address, Mr Luther Yaméogo, representing Zeneb Touré, Manager of the Civil Society and Community Engagement Division of the African Development Bank, warmly welcomed the massive presence of the representatives of North Africa's civil society organizations, bloggers and the media to the regional North Africa forum. He highlighted that the Bank's objectives could be achieved only with the active engagement of civil society. The COVID-19 has further shed light on the critical role of CSOs in improving impact actions and consolidating people's responsibility and resilience. This first regional forum organized in North Africa marked the beginning of a new partnership with civil society et should and should lead to the design of road map aimed at enhancing civil society engagement and improving the quality of the Bank's operations in North Africa.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Overview of discussions and panellists

- ***Mrs Basma Soudani,*** *Director, Political affairs, Union of the Arab Maghreb (UMA)*
- ***Mr Amine Bouhassane,*** *President,Think Tank Initiatives for the Maghreb's Economic Community, Tunisia*
- ***Prof. Ahmed Chehbouni,*** *President, Centre de Développement de la Région de Tensift (CDRT), Morocco*



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. Such discussions highlighted regional integration challenges in North Africa. The sub-region is facing challenges such as political instability, insecurity, limited cooperation between member countries and shortage of infrastructure links. Weaknesses in human development and mobility, infrastructure connectivity, as well as trade constraints, have repercussions on the stability and prosperity of the Maghreb, while impeding convergence and integration. Youth unemployment remains a major concern for all these countries. Discussions underscored the potential critical role of CSOs in reinforcing regional integration. Civil

society actors in North Africa highlighted the issue of civil society inclusion in the Bank's programmes and projects in the sub-region. They expressed the need for involving civil society in the design of the Regional Integration Strategic Paper for North Africa (RISP-NA). They also called on theBank to establish a financing instrument for civil society actors.

Mrs Besma Soudani recalled that the Bank and UMA had a common objective of reinforcing regional integration with the support of civil society. In particular, she stressed the need to strengthen regional infrastructure connectivity and increase cross-border investments and trade, through power pools and means of transport.

Key Messages

- It is essential to involve civil society in the design of the Regional Integration Strategic Paper for North Africa (RISP-NA).
- The Bank should think about establishing a financing instrument for civil society actors.
- Civil society needs to be fully integrated into the process of reinforcing regional integration.

10

TECHNICAL SESSIONS

Overview of presentations

- ***Mrs Rafika Amira,** Coordinator, Regional Integration (RDGN)*

While presenting the RISP-NA, she highlighted the main challenges and opportunities for regional integration in North Africa. The RISP-NA was designed to support regional integration efforts by the following six regional members countries (RMCs) of the African Development Bank Group: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. The core principles underpinning the design of the strategy are in line with those enshrined in the new RISP 2018-2025, though the various priorities are rather set in country strategy papers (CSPs), with different intervention levels. The strategy is based on two pillars, coupled with a cross-cutting theme: (i) Integrate North Africa through the promotion of regional infrastructure connectivity; (ii) Improve inter- and intra-regional trade by promoting the private sector; and (iii) build the capacities of existing support structures and design high-level policy dialogue based on a pragmatic vision of regional integration in North Africa.

- ***Mr Edward Nsobe, Capacity building and civil society cooperation officer, AfDB***

Cooperation between the Bank and civil society dates back to the 1990s when the Bank produced a strategic paper and a set of procedures, mechanisms and guidelines for the cooperation with NGOs, fa following a first meeting with these actors in Abidjan in 1990. Since the creation of a department in charge of civil society engagement within the Bank in 1997, important steps have been made in order to engage civil society with the Bank. The Civil Society and Community Engagement Division coordinates, monitors and reports on the engagement of civil society in the Bank-wide operations, procedures and policies. Mr Edward Nsobe showed how critical the engagement of civil society with the Bank was for the Bank's priority areas (High 5) and the new approach for integrating civil society engagement in the Bank's operations. This new approach is based on four pillars: (i) take into account civil society engagement in the Bank's policies and operations; (ii) strengthen civil society engagement capacities; (iii) ensure communication and sensitization; and (iv) forge strategic partnerships and advocacy.

Summary of Discussions

During the Q&A session, the Bank's experts and participants exchanged views on issues related to civil society engagement with the Bank. They include the involvement of civil society stakeholders in the design of the RISP-NA, the funding of civil society activities, and the cooperation between NGOs and the Bank. Discussions were open, frank and constructive.

As for the dialogue session that was organized around the involvement of civil society in the design of the Regional Integration Strategy Paper (RISP-NA) 2020-2026 and the various country strategy papers for the sub-region's states, participants included North Africa's civil society organizations, who were to be involved in the life cycle [from design to monitoring & evaluation] of the African Development Bank's projects.

With regard to funding civil society, CSOs are eligible to the different instruments and mechanisms of the Bank, especially the Trust Fund. Last year, three CSOs had already benefited from structural financing from the Africa Climate Change Fund for climate change interventions. The Civil Society and Community Engagement Division is working in collaboration with other Bank's services to develop financing instruments and mechanisms for SCOs.

Regarding the engagement of CSOs with the Bank, it depends on whether CSOs have already registered in the civil society database provided by the Bank. This Bank's database has over 2,000 registered civil society organizations classified per region and industry. They are expected to be involved in the life cycle of Bank-funded projects. This is an internal tool that enables the Bank to identify civil society organizations and cooperate directly with them for projects and operations.

The weak link between the CSO Forum and the CSO Committee, whose role as an advisory body is to guide the Bank's commitment to forging stronger relationships and partnerships with civil society, was highlighted. Also, the need to strengthen civil society links with the Bank's independent inspection mechanism. Indeed, thanks to the collaboration of civil society and the IRM, vulnerable populations can be protected from the negative impacts of certain development projects financed by the AfDB (highways, dams, etc.).

PATHWAYS

The following pathways were set out based on discussions and recommendations:

1. Work with CSOs and the representative of the Bank-CS Committee for North Africa in order to enhance regional participation to the world CSO forum 2022.

2. Ensure the involvement of civil society stakeholders in the design of country strategy papers 2022-2023 for the sub-region.

3. Organize 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.

4. Organize consultations on social and environmental safeguards with civil society in the sub-region by the second quarter of 2022.

CONCLUSION

Summary of the Session

During the forum, participants were able not only to discuss the role of civil society in strengthening of regional integration for inclusive post-COVID-19 building in North Africa, but also to share their opinion about the best way for the African Development Bank to collaborate with CSOs in order to achieve a common objective.

Way Forward

Discussions led to a road map to consolidate partnership between the Bank and civil society in North Africa. The aim is to ensure that civil society actors can participate in the design of country strategy papers for the sub-region's states, as well as in the design, management and monitoring of the Bank's operations, while being able to regularly consult with the institution through open houses.

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