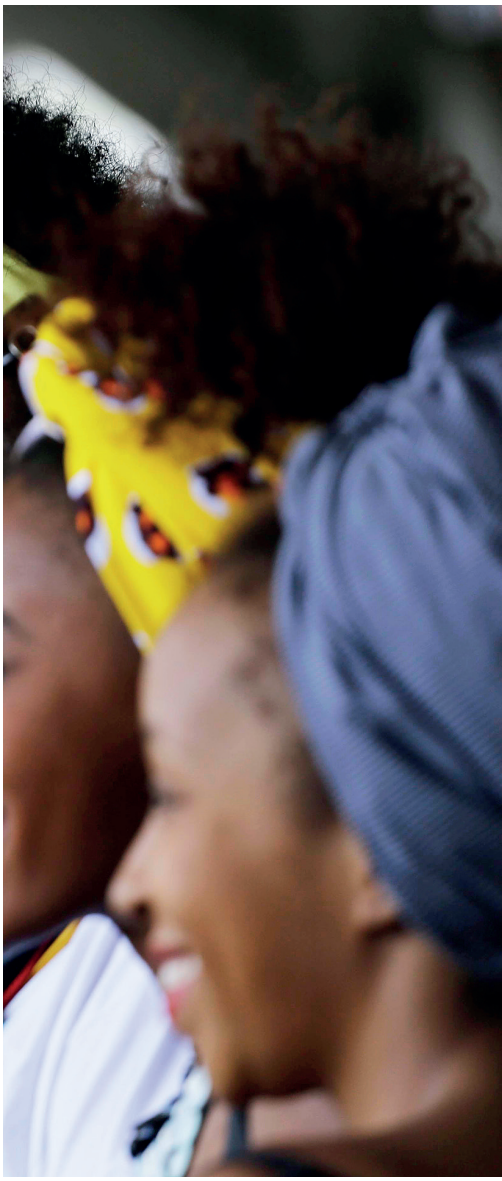
REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM CENTRAL AFRICA

ENGAGEMENT AVEC LA SOCIÉTÉ CIVILE
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«Role of Civil Society in the Participation of Women and Youths in the Post Covid-19 Buildings Process in **Central Africa** »





GROUPE DE LA BANQUE AFRICAINE
DE DÉVELOPPEMENT
AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP

October 26th, **2021**

ACRONYMS

AFAWA	Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa
AfDB	African Development Bank
RISF	Regional Integration Strategic Framework
RISP-CA	Regional Integration Strategy Paper (RISP) – Central Africa
CSP	Country Strategic Paper
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations

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INTRODUCTION

Context and Rationale

On Tuesday, 26 October 2021, the African Development Bank Group ("AfDB" or the "Bank") organized the first edition of Central Africa's Regional Civil Society Forum. The theme was, **"The role of civil society in the participation of women and youths in the post-COVID-19 building process in Central Africa".** This theme is underpinned by the two pillars of the Regional Integration Strategy Paper (RISP-CA) 2019–2025. The Forum, which was virtual, brought together some one hundred of civil society organizations from seven countries of the region, namely: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon. A good number of civil society organizations came from Cameroon, Gabon and DR Congo.

Discussions were mainly centred on the economic capacity building for women, and the youth skills development in order to give them more chances to access to employment, to participate in the post-COVID-19 resilience building efforts and the promotion of regional integration in the sub-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 2022 annual forum. The theme of regional fora is 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 Bank closer to its clients while contributing to improved service delivery.

Moreover, regional fora are aligned with the AfDB President call — on the occasion of the 2020 Civil Society Forum — 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, the Independent Development Evaluation (IDEV) indicates in one of its evaluations that the engagement of civil society with the Bank is lowly sustained by country and regional offices, and 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 committee so that it can fully get involved in the preparation and organization of fora as well as in the follow-up of their recommendations.

OPENING SESSION



Mrs Zeneb Toure, Manager of the Civil Society and Community Engagement Division (AfDB), warmly welcomed the massive presence of the representatives of Central Africa's civil society organizations, bloggers and the media at the regional Central Africa forum. She highlighted that the Bank's objectives could be achieved only with the active engagement of civil society. This first regional forum organized in Central Africa marked the beginning of a new partnership with civil society and should lead to the design of a road map aimed at enhancing civil society engagement and improving the quality of the Bank's operations in Central Africa.

Mr Solomane Koné, the Bank's Deputy General Manager for Central Africa, opened the forum with a welcome speech to the participants and recalled that civil society was fully involved in the country-level dialogue on the mi-term review of both the regional integration strategic paper 2019–2025 for Central Africa and country strategic papers for the countries of the regions. Civil society is also involved in several Bank's operations in the region, including the Chad–Niger trans-Saharan road project, the RD Congo's Bukavu–Goma road project, the forest reform project in Gabon, and the socio-economic infrastructures improvement project in the centre region. Mr Koné stressed on the importance of civil society in empowering economically the women and developing the youth's skills, especially in a context where the COVID-19 pandemic has weakened the structure of the economy and exacerbated poverty and unemployment mostly among the women and the youths, who account for the majority of Central Africa's population.

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ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Overview of discussions and panellists

- ***Mr Solomane Koné,*** *the Bank's Deputy General Manager for Central Africa*
- ***Mrs Danielle Nlate,*** *President, Réseau des Femmes Actives d'Afrique Centrale (REFAC)*
- ***Mr Christian Moussavou,*** *representing the youths*



Discussions focused mainly on women's economic capacity building and the youths' skills development in order to increase their chances of getting a job and participating in the efforts aiming to building post-COVID resilience and strengthening regional integration in the sub-region. Particular emphasis was on the importance of material and financial capacity building for CSOs and sharing experience with CSOs from other sub-regions of the continent. Civil society representatives equally lamented the lack of a Bank's direct support to CSOs. The youths have become more vulnerable due to the pandemic, and only a systematic change can enable half of them to get their way out of unemployment in Central Africa. It is urgent to find innovative solutions for this category, especially with their involvement in the design and implementation of youth-focused initiatives.

The Bank's deputy general manager for Central Africa recalled the Bank's responses geared toward promoting youth employment and women empowerment in Central Africa. He also indicated that the Bank has already developed facilities such as "Jobs for Youth in Africa" for the youths, and AFAWA for women empowerment.

Key Messages

- The Bank should increase civil society participation through CSOs capacity building in Cen-tral Africa.
- It is essential to develop synergy with other development partners, especially in the quest for financial mechanisms in favour of non-governmental entities.
- The condition of vulnerable and fragile women and youths need to be closely monitored.

TECHNICAL SESSIONS

Overview of presentations

- ***Mr. Youssouf Koné,** coordinator, regional integration, Central Africa*

Presenting the Regional Integration Strategy Paper for Central Africa (RISP-CA) 2019–2025, Mr Koné highlighted the challenges faced by the sub-region that needed to be overcome to enhance effective regional integration. To this end, the sub-region has a significant potential, including its bridge-like and strategic geographic location, the abundance of its natural resources that can stimulate social and economic development, and its demographic dividend based on a very largely young population (62%). He also underlined the role of the RISP-CA in addressing the fragility challenge, which is a major issue in the sub-region. He stressed the importance of partnerships with CSOs in meeting this challenge. Mr Koné concluded by informing CSO representatives about the Bank implementing already projects on capacity building, youth entrepreneurship support and the support to efforts geared toward the economic integration of vulnerable groups in Central Africa.

Case Study

- ***Mrs Eunice Tata, President of NKUMU FED FED (non-governmental organization), Cameroon***

During the presentation of the "project on the vocational training and economic empowerment of conflict-affected women and girls in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon", Mrs Tata underscored the key role of CSOs in assessing community needs in fragile contexts, as well as CSOs' ability to support the implementation Bank-funded projects. The shortage of financial and human resources remains the major constraint, she noted.

Summary of thematic discussions

- ***Workshop 1:** Role of civil society in the post-COVID-19 building process in Central Africa through women's economic empowerment*

The majority of CSOs underscored the need to keep emphasizing the status of women as drivers of change for Central Africa's transformation. CSOs also stressed the need for the Bank to build their technical and operational capacities in order to enable them to efficiently engage in the implementation of Bank's operations in Central Africa.

- ***Workshop 2:** Youth skills development and post-COVID-19 construction in Central Africa*

Representatives of CSOs emphasized the need to build the capacities of the youths and enhance their integration into the labour market, as this could contribute to reducing politically-based violence risks. The issue of youth mobility and free movement of people in Central Africa was also discussed.

PATHWAYS

Pathways 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. These pathways include:

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

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

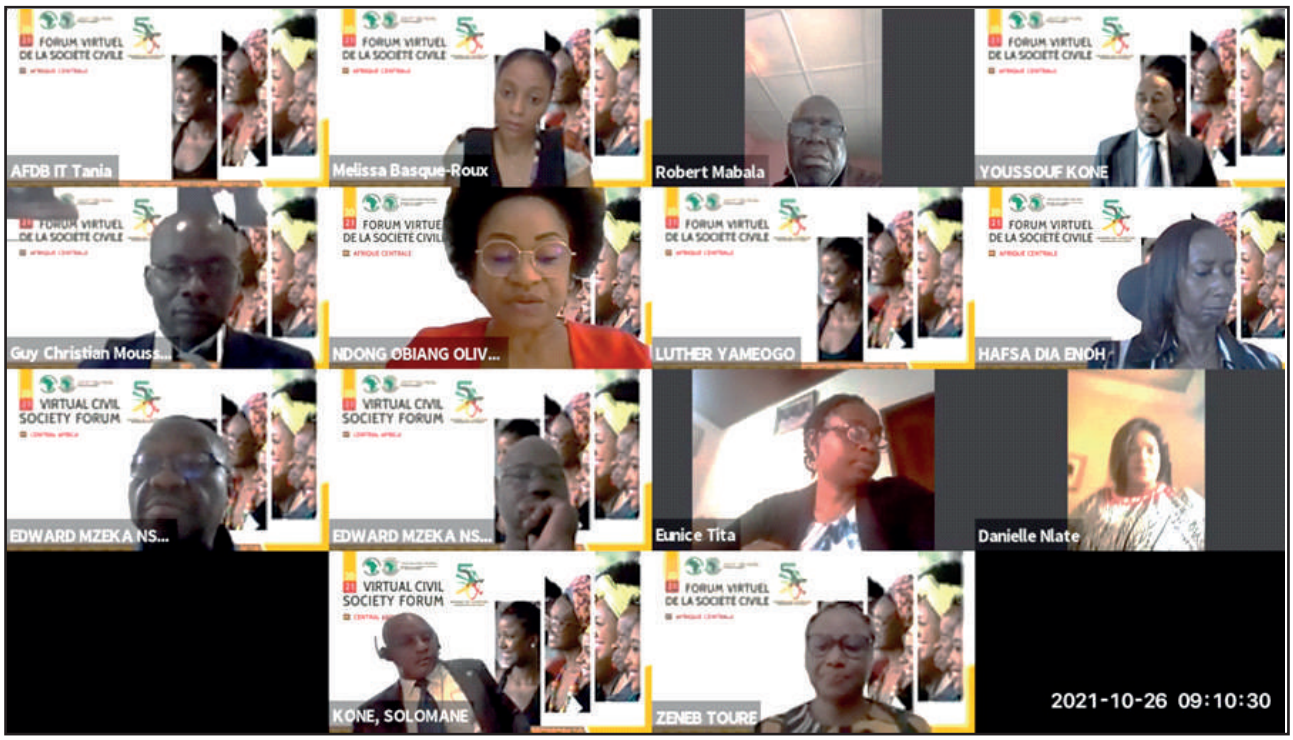
3. Organize at least four sessions of open houses in 2022–2023 in order to better inform civil society about the Bank's operations in regional member countries.

4. Organize sessions to build CSO capacity on the Bank's initiatives AFAWA and "Jobs for Youth in Africa" in the sub-region.

5. Build the capacities of local CSOs on the Bank's policies and operations.

Closing Address

In his concluding address, Mr Solomane Koné, the African Development Bank's deputy general manager for Central Africa, thanked the CSOs for their participation. He praised the Civil Society and Community Engagement Division of the Bank for their relentless efforts towards creating cooperative links with civil society. Equally, he ensured that all the recommendations set out, as well as the remarks made by CSOs during the forum, would be taken into account to design, revise or implement the instruments governing a beneficial partnership between the Bank and CSOs in Central Africa.



CONCLUSION

Overall, the first edition of the regional civil society forum in Central Africa was a successful event. Participants from all countries of the sub-region represented their organizations and took part in workshops and knowledge sharing sessions. Workshops ended with specific recommendations aimed at allowing a better involvement of civil society in the debates and decisions regarding regional integration. A prerequisite to this is the economic empowerment of women and the development of the youth skills. Recommendations also emphasized the role of civil society in the post-COVID-19 rebuilding process in Central Africa.

Most of CSO representatives expressed their satisfaction for the organization and usefulness of the regional forum. They suggested that the Bank should henceforth communicate better with CSOs by providing them more upstream information.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the regional civil society forum organized in Central Africa serves as a genuine platform for sharing experience, thus positioning itself as an example for future regional fora.



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