



**REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS CONSULTATION**  
**“Effective Advocacy with Regional Mechanisms”**  
**30 May to 1 June 2012 Abuja, Nigeria**

**Background and Introduction**

In the realm of continental integration, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are considered the building blocks of the African Union (AU). They have a pivotal role to play in the continental integration agenda as well as in operationalising various elements of the AU architecture. The RECs Protocol<sup>1</sup> provides for the formalisation, consolidation and enhanced co-operation between the African Union and the RECs. Although the AU integration process requires the merging of RECs, the current focus is on the harmonisation of priorities within the RECs, between the RECs themselves and between the RECs and the AU.

The eight RECs officially recognised by the AU are:

- East African Community (EAC), established in 1967 (revived in 1993), with a Secretariat in Arusha, Tanzania constituting 5 countries
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), established in 1975, Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria constituting 15 countries
- Southern African Development Community (SADC), established in 1980, Secretariat in Gaborone, Botswana constituting 15 countries
- Common Market of East & Southern Africa (COMESA), established in 1982, Secretariat in Lusaka, Zambia constituting 19 countries
- Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), including Angola, established in 1983, Secretariat in Libreville, Congo constituting 6 countries
- Arab Maghreb Union (UMA/AMU), established in 1988, currently frozen due to political disagreements, constituting 5 countries
- Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), established in 1998, Secretariat in Tripoli, Libya, single largest membership of 29 countries
- Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), established in 1996 (replacing 1986 IGADD), Secretariat in Djibouti, 6 countries

It is evident that what happens at Continental level affects the regional and what happens at the region affects the Continental. However, there is little harmony between the organisational structure of the RECs and the AU despite the provisions made in the Protocol on the Relations between the African Union and RECs. The effectiveness of any coordination and harmonisation between the AU and the RECs will be dependent on the political will of member states who constitute both the RECs and the AU.

In this respect, civil society organisations operating at regional and continental levels like the AU member states, wish to see an acceleration in the integration process of Africa and also want to ensure that the integration process proceeds with the involvement of the citizens of Africa and is undertaken in the context of multi-stakeholder partnerships. This will ensure that the Objectives of widening and deepening co-operation among the African States in among other areas, political, economic, social, cultural, health, education, science and technology, defence, security, legal and judicial affairs is

---

<sup>1</sup> Protocol on Relations between the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

achieved for the benefit of the people of Africa.

As such, civil society has organised and engaged at regional and continental levels however they tend to be issue or thematic based. The Centre for Citizens' Participation on the African Union is the only continental space that brings together the different thematic and geographic civil society groups on the African continent. Regionally while there are several regional issues and thematic networks it is the regional networks whose formations shadow the RECs that brings the various stakeholders together as follows; for West Africa it is the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF), for East Africa it is the East Africa Civil Society Forum (EACSOF) and for Southern Africa it is the SADC Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (SADC CNGO). There is yet to be a body representing civil society in central Africa and in North Africa.

There is a clear need to enhance linkages, co-ordination and collaboration between continental and regional advocacy, by regularly meeting to share experiences, identify and review advocacy initiatives, set strategies and priorities, discuss continental and regional agendas, and make best use of existing and upcoming opportunities. There is also a need for the building the capacity of Africans and African CSOs to engage the RECs and the AU, and conduct effective advocacy through a concrete understanding of decision-making processes at regional and continental levels.

It is in this regard that a meeting is being organised between the Continental and Regional CSO formations engaging at both the AU and REC levels. The CCP-AU is holding this meeting in partnership with the Open Society Foundations African Union Advocacy program and AfriMAP. The CCP-AU is partnering with WACSOF in hosting the meeting.

### **Goal and Objectives of the meeting.**

**Goal:** The overarching goal of the meeting is to lay the foundations of strengthening civil society coordination in its engagement with the continent's intergovernmental bodies.

**Objectives:** The specific objectives of the meeting include;

1. To discuss an overview of the state of affairs on integration in Africa with respect to actors and players of integration on the continent.
2. To assess the interventionist roles of regional civil society networks with regards to achieving the integration process in all the AU and RECs.
3. To create a platform for regional civil society networks to share their experiences on their interventions in the integration process in their regions as well as their experiences on engaging their respective RECs and the AU in the process of integration and development.
4. To develop strategies and approaches towards building and consolidating civil society networks in all RECs and at the continental level for effective coordination;
5. To strategise on interventions for strengthening CSO engagement with ECOSOCC (short, medium and long term approaches and interventions modalities).
6. To develop appropriate strategies and tools to harmonize, facilitate and/or enhance advocacy initiatives of the regional CSOs network for effective engagement with the RECs and with the AU.

### **Rationale and Justification**

One of the main factors that accounts for the slow pace of integration in Africa is the inadequate constructive entry-points and engagement for CSOs in the policy processes of RECs and the AU as well as the implementation mechanism for the integration policies of the RECs and AU. In addition to this, there is little harmony between the organizational structure of the RECs and the AU despite the provisions made in the Protocol on the Relations between the African Union and RECs. In this regard, civil society organizations at both the regional and continental levels are eager to see acceleration in the integration process of Africa. In addition they are committed to ensuring that the integration process proceeds with the involvement of Africans through civil society and that the integration process is undertaken within the context of multi-stakeholder partnership within the purview of ensuring that the objectives of widening and deepening co-operation among the African States focused on the benefits for Africans.

Civil society indeed has pivotal roles to play in the integration of Africa. The RECs as well as the AU in their treaties, protocols and constitutive Acts respectively provide for consultation and engagement with the civil society in their processes including the implementation of these processes. For instance, Article 81 (2) of the Revised ECOWAS Treaty provides that the Community set up mechanisms for consultation with civil society with a view to encouraging the involvement of the peoples of the region in its processes. Hence, there exist legal justifications for mobilizing civil society to engage the ECOWAS in facilitating a people driven development and integration. In addition, article 63 (3) (b) of the ECOWAS Treaty provides that Member States shall establish a mechanism for cooperation with civil society.

In the SADC Treaty that was adopted in 1992 and which entered into force in 1993, and which was modified by the 2001 Agreement Amending the Treaty of SADC as the founding treaty, article 23 (1) provides that In pursuance of the objectives of the Treaty, SADC shall seek to involve fully the peoples of the region and non-governmental organizations in the process of regional integration. In addition, article 23 (1) provides that SADC shall co-operate with, and support the initiatives of the peoples of the region and non-governmental organizations, contributing to the objectives of this Treaty in the areas of co-operation in order to foster closer relations among the communities, associations and peoples of the region.

In the treaty establishing the EAC there are several provisions of cooperation with the civil society in diverse thematic area. Chapter 25, article 127 (3) specifically states that the EAC member states agree to promote enabling environment for the participation of civil society in the development activities within the Community. In addition, the Secretary General shall provide the forum for consultations between civil society organizations and the appropriate institutions of the Community.

Article 3 (l) of AU Constitutive Act provides *that* coordinate and harmonize the policies between the existing and future Regional Economic Communities for the gradual attainment of the objectives of the Union including integration in the continent while article 3 (k) provides that the AU shall promote co-operation (including cooperation and collaboration with civil society across the continent) in all fields of human activity to raise the living standards of African peoples;

The proximity of CSOs to the local populations is another major factor that justifies their roles in facilitating the integration process and development in Africa for the benefits of Africans. Civil society organizations are potential implementing partners of the RECs and of the AU of the regional integration policies and mechanisms. Hence, this meeting will create opportunities to explore potential areas of collaboration.

In the light of the above, the CCP-AU is interested in knowing how it could rally the ensemble of regional CSOs networks in Africa for an enhanced and effective engagement with the RECs as well as with the AU in facilitating an accelerated integration and development in Africa within the purview of enhancing the lot of Africans. Hence, this meeting would provide an entry point for the CCP-AU to maximize the network, knowledge and expertise of the regional networks of CSOs in order to actualize the objectives of the meeting<sup>2</sup> and to ensure the realization of the vision and mission of the CCP-AU through the regional CSOs networks and umbrella groups of CSOs under the regional networks of CSOs as well as provide individual civil society organizations within the regional networks of CSOs the opportunity to offer and access information, advocate and engage in facilitating the acceleration of the integration of Africa for the benefits of Africans.

### **Programme for the meeting**

A detailed programme shall be developed in line with the above stated objectives however in a brief summary the meeting is expected to focus on the following issues;

Day 1: An overview of the state of play on continental integration; overview of state of civil society engagement with AU & RECs; overview and experiences sharing between the 3 regional CSO networks.

Day 2: Developing strategies and defining areas and ways of collaboration; focusing on proposed initiatives (i) Campaign on the Freedom of Movement in Africa (ii) enhancing effective engagement in ECOSOCC and (iii) developing tools to enhance engagement with the RECs e.g. guides to engage each of the RECs (to be continued to day 3)

Day 3: continue with issues from day 2 and conclude with a way forward on how to ensure coordination at continental level; agree on next steps on each of the issues discussed and an execution to ECOWAS facilitated by WACSOF.

### **Dates and Venue of the Meeting**

It is proposed that the meeting be held over 3 days from the 30<sup>th</sup> of May to the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2012. The meeting is to be held at the Gombe Jewel hotel in Abuja, Nigeria.

### **Participants**

Participants will comprise of representatives of the established civil society regional networks. Each regional network i.e. WACSOF, EACSOF and SADC CNGO are expected to have 5 representatives comprising of office bearers, secretariats/staff and members of the networks. 3 representatives of the CCP-AU representing the continental will also attend. The Open Society Initiative African Union Advocacy Programme and Afrimap will also attend the meeting.

### **Language of the Meeting**

The meeting will be conducted in English and French with simultaneous translation being provided. All background documents will also be translated into both English and French.

---

<sup>2</sup> Please refer to the goal and objectives of the meeting above.