

# **AFRICA-WIDE CSO ADVOCACY STRATEGY FOR ENGAGING WITH THE AU AND OTHER REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

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Report on Roundtable Organised by World Vision Africa<sup>1</sup>  
**22<sup>nd</sup> November 2006, Nairobi**

## **1. Introduction (extract from opening remarks by Prof Wilfred Mlay, Regional Vice President, World Vision Africa)**

Since the African Union was launched in Durban in July 2002, it has quickly emerged as a pivotal institution in shaping the future of Africa. Its vision – to “build an integrated Africa, a prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena” – is one that all of us buy into and support unreservedly. The AU is already demonstrating its potential. It has sought to lead in conflict management and resolution efforts, notably in Sudan, Darfur where it has dispatched African peacekeepers. It has begun asserting itself as interlocutor on trade issues, and was instrumental in developing a common African negotiating position in advance of the Hong Kong Ministerial of the World Trade Organisation in December 2005. It also mobilized African countries around the Africa-China partnership agenda, and is doing the same in advance of the 2007 Africa-EU Summit.

Three things have emerged as being of critical importance to civil society organisations: the importance of working in partnerships; the need to share experiences; and the fact that the various Pan Africa institutions themselves have recognised that good policies emanate from active engagement with citizens and civil society organisations. All of these combined to spark World Vision’s interest in continental policy advocacy, to commission research on CSOs and the AU, and to invite other civil society organisations to the deliberations on the AU and other regional institutions in Africa.

The Roundtable deliberations provide a useful opportunity to share insights into both the Africa Union and its organs, and the strategies CSOs are developing and implementing to help reinforce and influence the AU agenda.

## **2. Roundtable Objectives**

- i. Share current CSOs’ research on the African Union.
- ii. Explore and identify opportunities for joint CSO engagement with the AU and its organs.
- iii. Map tentative plan of action for joint CSOs’ engagement with the AU.

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## **ACRONYMS**

AfriMAP	Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project, OSISA
AFRODAD	African Forum and Network on Debt and Development
AU	Africa Union
AUC	Africa Union Commission
CIDO	Africa Union African Citizens Directorate
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
ECOSOCC	Economic, Social and Cultural Council
INGO	International Non Governmental Organisation
REC	Regional Economic Communities
WGD	Women and Gender Directorate of the Africa Union
WV	World Vision

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<sup>1</sup> With support from WV UK and WV Australia

### 3. Summary of Presentations

Three papers were presented and discussed at the Roundtable:

- o CSO-AU Engagement: Challenges, Opportunities and Prospects. Findings from research commissioned by World Vision, 2006. *Peter da Costa, World Vision*
- o Taking the Union to the Capitals: some reflections. *Irungu Houghton, Oxfam GB*
- o The Africa Union and Civil Society: ECOSOCC experience<sup>2</sup>. *Charles Mutasa, ECOSOCC*

#### 3.1 CSO-AU Engagement: Challenges, Opportunities and Prospects. Findings from research commissioned by World Vision, 2006. *Peter da Costa, World Vision.*

The Africa Union structure is complex with many different organs. This presents challenges for CSOs as they must first work out the importance of each arm of the Africa Union in order to decide where to focus their energies if policy change is to be achieved. In summary the Africa Union is made up of – Assembly of the Union, Executive Council, Permanent Representatives Committee, Pan-African Parliament, ECOSOCC, AU Commission, Peace and Security Council, African Courts/ Commission, Financial Institutions and potentially an African Union Government.

*Modes of Engagement: with the Africa Union*

- o **CSO as Technocrat:** It's clear that increasingly, significant expertise and resources reside in CSOs. The AU Commission recognizes this and taps into that capacity. This is an important entry point for CSOs, but it does raise issues of power and who determines the agenda.
- o **CSO as Advocate:** the AU and CSOs are both advocates, so this is about a division of labour that helps the AU overcome its lack of country presence or mechanisms to implement continental norms in countries.
- o **CSO as Co-Implementer:** Some NGOs have strong country presence and can harness this to help implement AU-initiated norms and standards, for example on child rights.
- o **CSO as Contractor:** This is controversial, as questions of autonomy, space and agendas arise.

*Suggested next steps for CSOs*

1. The AU has done its job by creating the space for the Pre-Forum Summit. CSOs now need to take primary responsibility for organizing it, funding it, forging partnerships and linkages, and making it a strong, quasi-autonomous space for CSO engagement around the AU agenda.
2. Action is not only in Addis Ababa, but also in Midrand, in the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), in the hotspots (Somalia etc), and anywhere there is a burning set of issues to be addressed.
3. Building capacity must be an explicit priority of any partnership between international and African CSOs.
4. Strategic partnerships make the difference between success and failure. These should be based on common interest and division of labour. There are too many overlapping and parallel initiatives.
5. It seems that joint NGO facilities in Addis Ababa and Midrand are inevitable, and it is only a matter of time. These are very important initiatives, and they need to be supported. But most of all, they need to be critically examined by as many CSO actors as have the competence to do so. There are variations on the concepts, and the facilities will be successful to the extent that they are owned by wide CSO constituencies, respond to the needs at hand, and are sustainable. Accountable and transparent governance of these facilities is key. So too is effectiveness, and clear mechanisms need to be put in place to measure and critically evaluate impact.

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<sup>2</sup> Economic, Social and Cultural Council

### *Questions from participants to World Vision*

- *Many NGOs are trying to shape the AU agenda through joint action. Does World Vision see itself as an enabler?*
- *Will World Vision help people's associations to engage directly? Will World Vision offer grants for capacity building?*
- *Should World Vision try to help create an NGO common space – a community of action – to bring the different organisations that operate in Addis together? Will World Vision focus on single issue or multiple issues that they want to engage with AU?*
- *What is the substantive cause that World Vision wants to stand for?*

### **3.2 Taking the Union to the capitals: Some reflections. Irungu Houghton, Oxfam.**

The following are highlights from a joint study, commissioned by AFRODAD, AfriMAP and Oxfam, into how Member States prepare for the African Union Summits and Opportunities for Civil Society Engagement. The research will be released during the AU Heads of State Summit in Addis Ababa, January 2007.

#### **Member states**

##### *Blocks to the vision*

Almost exclusive involvement of the Executive (OP, MFA)/In-effective monitoring of the implementation of decisions/Responsibility ducked for accelerating CSO engagement/Many states defaulting on dues/Late submission of agenda items/Few Vision champions, mainstream mistrust of non-state actors

##### *State Levers for change*

- Pre and post Summit national consultations with other line ministries, Parliament and CSOs and mass media briefings
- Promptly meet assessed financial contributions
- Review institutional arrangements in line with AU complexity

#### **Africa Union**

##### *Blocks to the Vision*

AUC understaffed and underfunded/Late & limited circulation of agenda & working documents/Few directorates engage non-state actors effectively/Host agreements fail to guarantee autonomous CSO space

##### *AUC Levers for change*

- Accelerate e-project that links Addis and capitals, invest substantially in the AU website
- Initiate public disclosure policy modelled on international and African best practise
- Improve management of CIDO and WGD Directorate organised pre-CSO and womens meetings
- Finalisation of Observer Status Criteria

#### **ECOSOCC**

##### *Blocks to the Vision*

Interim continental and national ECOSOCC chapters have weak legitimacy, lack visibility and policy influence/Autonomous policy engagement producing influence and voice on critical matters, but lessons not being felt across AU/"AU engagers" too few, restricted to NGOs and collective learning and sharing limited

#### *ECOSOCC and CSO levers for change*

- Guidelines for transparent and democratic ECOSOCC elections
- Greater ECOSOCC national role in information dissemination
- Amendment of Summit Rules of Procedure to require ECOSOCC in-put
- Widen circles of CSO participation in the affairs of the African Union especially among people associations who are directly affected
- Support the establishment of proposed CSO support facilities in Addis and Midrand to inform and assist convening of CSOs

### **3.3 The Africa Union and Civil Society: ECOSOCC experience. Charles Mutasa, ECOSOCC**

ECOSOCC is still a mechanism that is in its formulation stages, the Interim ECOSOCC was launched in March 2005. The vision of ECOSOCC is to have national chapters that will engage with the AU on issues of concern to civil society including condemning human rights abuses. It is envisaged that ECOSOCC membership will total 150 with at least two representatives from each African country.

#### **Discussion:**

*Q: How genuine is the AU in terms of civil society engagement? What possibilities are there for CSOs to lever ECOSOCC?*

ECOSOCC is currently in an interim state, and trying to popularise and discuss how best to use the 150 spaces allocated to civil society. It is all about structures at the moment, and these need to be sorted out otherwise organisations will be talking to a vacuum. While that is happening, CSOs need to focus on how to put content into these structures. There is a need for a multiplicity of forums, since CSOs are not able to fill all spaces adequately.

*Q: Should INGOs be allowed to take up spaces allocated to CSOs? Some local NGOs feel that their issues are small compared to those of INGOs, so their voices may not be heard. Will ECOSOCC be able to hear different NGO voices?*

The ECOSOCC Statutes talk about membership and criteria, but no debate has been held on this yet. Many feel that if NGOs are African, even if part of an INGO, they can and should have a role. The question is not about where the money comes from – it is about where the centre of gravity of the organisation is. It may be glib to write off an INGO based on where money comes from. It is more important to look at mutual partnership, respect, and agenda setting. NGOs and INGOs can function at different levels with organisations like the AU, and there is a sense that we need to seize opportunities at every level.

*Q: Should CSOs be helping the AU to popularise participation in AU processes?*

A strategic question for NGOs is, how much does an organisation want to invest in the institutional space, vis-à-vis trying to create issue-based spaces?

### Space and opportunities for CSOs

- Accountability: the extent to which member states live up to their obligations / fulfil standards that have been set, eg on the African Charter on the Rights of the Child. CSOs need to be aware that governments may be more accountable to structures / organs other than the AU, eg ECOWAS
- Resource allocation: This is linked to accountability. CSOs need to focus on where resources are going in the AU and to make sure they are going to the right places
- Coalition work: CSOs need to articulate common issues for advocacy and share their experiences. Yet we can't assume that all CSOs will want to be involved. Trying to engage with AU means that CSOs also have to be fully grounded in what is happening at the national level. Engagement with AU can't be left to one or two CSO representatives –the whole organisation needs to buy into AU engagement. Linked to coalition work is the suggestion that CSOs have a common vision,
- The Africa Peer Review Mechanism
- Support for AU capacity building, which will grow as the mandate of the AU grows: AU staff and the organisation are already overstretched. There are resulting problems, from agenda setting to implementation, including resource allocation. At what level should CSOs engage?
- Pan-Africanism – this notion is still largely held by intellectuals. CSOs and NGOs have a role to play in promoting the notion, and could thereby help to strengthen the AU and other pan-African institutions.
- Human Rights and Democracy building – this is a growing area that needs deliberate engagement
- Participation by civil society in the AU can't be done by default through ECOSOCC. CSOs need to focus on the demand side of civil society engagement.
- Credibility of the AU – it is seen as a cloud that floats around but doesn't deliver, so there is a need for information to be disseminated and for support if citizens are going to engage.

## 4. Summary of Group Discussions

### Group I: What should World Vision do in its engagement with the AU and organs?

- Child Rights: Focus on the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (harmonisation, reporting) and support to the Commission to include child rights in their agenda. Other areas linked to child rights / children include: energy, markets, natural resources, climate change and food security and their impact on children.
- Governance: the promotion of democratic values, e.g. Court of Justice
- Facilitating / Convening of CSO Structures – institutional development of CSO structures
- Integration of national / regional / continental structures on thematic issues (upward flow of voices)
- Bring experts together to prioritise AU agenda (sponsoring meetings, possible joint action)
- Support Agenda Setting
- Accountability – of African states
- Broker institutional relationships – who are the power brokers? Help to identify them

### Group II: Civil Society vision for engagement with AU and organs

- Vision: African governance and development to holistically advance and fulfil human rights including child rights / promote, protect and fulfil child rights at the local, national and continental levels. CSOs adopt policies, principles and practices that enable local level capacity building to enable engagement locally, nationally and continentally

- CSOs agree on appropriate investment at different levels:
  - ✓ Co-ordinated presence and engagement in Addis / Midrand / RECs
  - ✓ Information sharing
  - ✓ Mapping sites for reinforcing rights – invest resources
  - ✓ INGOs commit to reduce visibility to enable local and directly affected community self-action

### **Group III: How to support the AU and organs**

- Understand decision making structures and processes of AU/RECs in order to provide necessary support
- There is a dearth of information and knowledge about AU/RECs: research and share information, raise awareness of AU/RECs with CSOs and communities and vice versa
- Capacity building of AU Secretariat and CSOs to be able to engage (technical support / personal secondments / lobbying skills through dialogue with appropriate officials of AU)
- Advocacy to the nation states to meet their commitments and provide additional support – for example through use of score cards
- Support the structures and operations of AU to be able to deliver
- Support the Secretariat with a think tank
- Sponsor a test case at the African Court of Justice
- Support for resource mobilisation for ECOSOCC
- Mobilising CSOs constituencies at the NO to engage with AU at both national and regional levels

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The new Africa Union has adopted a vision that facilitates active engagement by civil society organisations. However, understanding and effectively monitoring the Africa Union and all its organs requires both dedicated CSO resources (human as well as financial) and collaborative action.

World Vision is committed to focusing on the Africa Union as an important policy making organ and will be looking to other civil society organisations on the continent for support and collaboration.

We can succeed in shaping the direction our continent is taking only if we work together.

## **ANNEX I**

### **Africa-wide CSO Advocacy Strategy for engaging with the AU and other Regional Institutions**

Organised by World Vision Africa<sup>3</sup>

#### **Round table – Agenda, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2006**

**8.15 Registration, tea and coffee**

**8.30 Introductions**

**Opening Remarks**

Wilfred Mlay, WV Africa Regional Vice President

**9.15 Presentations:**

World Vision research findings

Reaction/Response to Civil Society Presentations

Q and A

**11.00 Tea Break**

Oxfam/AfriMAP/AFRODAD<sup>4</sup> – indications on how Africa States Prepare for the Summit

Reaction/Response to Civil Society Presentations

Q and A

**1.00 Lunch**

**2.00 CSO and the AU – a view from the inside:**

AFRODAD experience as CS representative at the Africa Union

Reaction/Response to Civil Society Presentations

Q and A

**3.00 Strategy – space and opportunities for CSOs**

**4.00 Close and Tea**

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<sup>3</sup> Supported by WV UK and WV Australia

<sup>4</sup> African Network on Debt and Development

## ANNEX 2

### Africa-wide CSO Advocacy Strategy for engaging with the AU and other Regional Institutions

Organised by World Vision Africa

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