



African Civil Society Circle

Inaugural meeting; 14 – 15 August 2014, Johannesburg

Workshop summary

Supported by:



BACKGROUND

Time and location:	14-15 August 2014, Johannesburg, South Africa
Participants/ organizations:	Jonathan Zinyandu, AFRODAD (Zimbabwe) Folasade Ayonrinde, African Capacity Building Foundation (Zimbabwe) Dr. Rama Naidu, Democracy Development Program (South Africa) Prof. Oladele Arowolo, Prof. Phindile Lukhele-Olorunju, Human Sciences Research Council (South Africa) Graham Hopwood, Institute for Public Policy Research (Namibia) Stephanie Wolters, Institute for Security Studies (South Africa) Boichoko A. Ditlhake, SADC Council of NGOs (Botswana) Dr. Ola Bello, South African Institute of International Affairs (South Africa) Kijala Shako, Southern African Trust (South Africa).
External speakers:	Mike Hammond, Head of DFID Southern Africa Gus Mandigora, Regional Policy Manager for OXFAM Southern Africa Sybille Pfeiffer, Member of the German Bundestag Dr. Georg Kippels, Member of the German Bundestag Dr. Katja Pohlmann, policy advisor on Economic Cooperation and Development at the CDU/CSU parliamentary caucus
Facilitators and organizers:	Dr. Holger Dix, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Alexander Gaus, Global Public Policy Institute Marius Glitz, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Farai Morobane, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Dr. Julia Steets, Global Public Policy Institute Lennah de Nobrega, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

The inaugural workshop of the African Civil Society Circle was convened on 14-15 August 2014 in Johannesburg with two main overarching goals: to strengthen the connections between think tanks and civil society organizations in Southern Africa and to develop and promote common positions on key development challenges. With these goals in mind, the group discussed and defined thematic priorities, decided on a series of initial outputs that will promote positions on key African development challenges, as well as agreed on conferences and fora that the group aims to address and influence.

From a thematic standpoint, the group defined its mission as "*advancing the African agenda and promoting good governance*". The ambition to advance the African agenda reflects the desire to have a continental outlook, however, this does not restrict the group from addressing the regional, national and local level as well. The ambition to promote good governance comes from the shared observation among participants that the most pressing issues many countries in Africa face are related to good governance. The group felt that good governance is lacking across the continent and a central reason why many African countries are not developing as well and as swiftly as they could.

Moreover, triggered by recent restrictions on independent research institutes and think tanks in Namibia, the participants discussed the need for a solidarity statement concerning the importance of independent research. Finally, the group expressed concern about the lack of actual implementation of sound policy recommendations coming from civil society organizations and think tanks by governments.

With regards to the concrete issues within the "good governance" theme, the group agreed to prioritize:

- policy implementation, which concerns the uptake of policies and recommendations given to policymakers;
- illicit financial flows and development financing, which is about ensuring that a state has enough resources to finance development;
- election monitoring, where more rigor is needed assessing existing processes;
- capacity building, in particular of leadership to ensure policy implementation that benefits society;
- gender, which is about ensuring engagement of women in both leadership and policy design;
- civic engagement and creating open societies, which must be based on and support free speech and human rights;
- natural resource management, which is central to advance development and reduce inequalities;

- migration policy and practice, which has strong regional implications;
- regional and continental integration, which runs at different speeds and has various implications on policies and development outcomes.

Other issues mentioned and discussed but not seen as immediate priorities were (these may however be taken up at a later point): Climate change and its practical implications on the region; Increasing role of the private sector in the development discourse; Peace and security as foundations for development; New aid players; Shrinking space for CSOs and their work; Economic justice and inequality.

To address some of the thematic priorities right away, the group will develop common positions and publish position papers and opinion articles on two main issues in the coming months:

- 1) on the governance of illicit financial flows.
- 2) on the importance of defining possible steps and activities that governments should take to implement the development goals emerging from the post-MDG debate.

The goal is to present the first position papers at the upcoming [African Development Forum](#) taking place in Morocco on 12-16 October 2014. The presentation format for the second paper is to be determined.

Expectations and modes of collaboration

In addition to defining thematic priorities, the group highlighted a number of expectations for the African Civil Society Circle network:

- Action and impact!
- Increase leverage of individual organizations and those each one is connected with
- Bringing the development agenda closer to the people on the ground
- Bridge the gap between research, government and civil society
- Promote and improve the uptake of policy recommendations
- Learn from each other and improve information sharing on outputs and opportunities for informing policymakers
- Increase efficiency and minimize duplication of efforts
- Provide support and solidarity towards each other and promote independent and objective research
- Ensure sustainability and long-term prospects of the network

Further, the group discussed the added-value of collaborating as a network. The group stressed five benefits that also show the aspirations of the network:



Outputs and plan of action

Combining the thematic priorities with the aspirations of the workshop participants, the group decided to focus on a small set of outputs to "launch" the work of the African Civil Society Circle. This includes a solidarity statement on the importance of independent research, two position papers related to the theme of good governance, op-eds based on the position papers, as well as a presentation by group members of one position paper at the upcoming African Development Forum taking place in Morocco on 12-16 October 2014.

Plan of Action

Solidarity statement	What:
	Independent research has become increasingly difficult to conduct in Namibia. Namibian researchers and think tanks – among them Graham Hopwood and the Institute for Public Policy Research - have to get their research accredited with the government, which curtails free and independent research and investigations. Other countries in Southern Africa do not report similar restrictions, but the group is concerned about the prospects of curtailed research in Southern Africa. The group discussed publishing a solidarity statement highlighting the importance of independent research and its relation to good governance. While everyone agreed on the importance of such a solidarity statement, some participants were unable to commit to "signing" such a document since this may require organizational approval.
Position papers	What: The group decided to publish two position papers related to the theme of good governance by the end of 2014. Each position paper should be roughly two pages, provide key recommendations to policymakers on the issue discussed and list existing publications of each organization on the issue. The first position paper will be on the importance of implementing practical measures that address illicit financial flows draining resources from African countries and which can improve development financing. The second paper will be on the importance of defining possible steps and activities that governments should take to implement the development goals emerging from the post-MDG debate. The paper seeks to rebalance the current

international debate that is mainly concerned with defining outcomes and indicators at the expense of the necessary steps toward implementation, which do not yet feature in the post-MDG framework. An African voice on this would be an important and timely contribution to the ongoing post-MDG negotiations.

Op-eds

What

The group agreed that opinion articles (around 800 words) based on the position papers and published in print and online newspapers offer a good vehicle to further disseminate the ideas of the group. Possible outlets are national newspaper (e.g. Globe and Mail) and websites such as allafrica.com or Project Syndicate.

Conference participation/ side-events

What

We agreed to use upcoming international or regional conferences and high-level meetings as entry points to publish and communicate our positions. This would ideally happen through side-events and presentations but also personal conversations.

Other fora to address

The group discussed additional potential fora/opportunities that could be used to advance the messages of the network in the future. In addition to the upcoming African Development Forum, the most relevant are:

- High-Level stocktaking event on the post-2015 development agenda, September 2014
- Ninth African Development Forum (ADF), October 2014
- UNSG Synthesis report on the post-2015 development agenda, November/December 2014
- Launch of UNECA High-Level Panel on Illicit Financial flows, 2015
- African Union summit, January 2015
- Third international conference on financing for development, 2016
- IMF/World Bank Annual meetings, spring and fall of each year
- Launch of African Development Bank African Economic Outlook reports
- Meetings of the AU Peace and Security Group
- Conference of African finance ministers
- Regional Economic bodies annual summits
- Africa Mining Indaba

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The network image on the cover page was taken from [here](#)