

Taking a “Less is More” Approach

KAS-GPPI AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY CIRCLE WORKSHOP, 14-15 AUGUST 2014

Over the 14 and 15 August, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) co-hosted an African Civil Society Circle workshop with its partner the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI). The intention of the workshop was to expand on a new initiative to strengthen the voices of Sub-Saharan African civil society organizations in global debates and forums on development issues. In total 10 different organizations, excluding KAS and GPPI, took part in the pilot gathering of this Civil Society Circle.

In the past it has been noted that Sub-Saharan Africa civil society actors do not enjoy large influence in global discourse on development issues. The aim of creating this Sub-Saharan Africa Civil Society Circle is to generate stronger ties between civil society, academics and think tanks. This will encourage the sharing of knowledge, experiences and expertise with one another and in turn sustainably increase their impact on global debates. It also allows for contribution to more inclusive and transparent discussions on development issues, especially with regard to Southern Africa. Ultimately, this collaboration would like to see its cooperation stretch across the African continent, linking many different civil society organizations, think tanks and academic institutions.

Sharing and pooling knowledge also highlights common themes of issues or topics that need attention and the mutual positions different organisations may hold. This eliminates a huge amount of timeous efforts at debates and forums that would be spent on establishing common grounds. The wasting of valuable time for finding solutions or discussing important concerns is thus omitted. Amalgamating knowledge and expertise

ensures that all members benefit and contribute equally. What one may think of, another may not and *visa versa*.

Taking an approach to having one voice, saying the same thing for all, has a stronger impact than many voices saying the same thing in different words. This is another reason for forming this Civil Society Circle. When attending global and local events the Circle will send representatives to convey their views and takes on points of order.

Proceedings and Participants’ Expectations of the Workshop

On the morning of the 14th of August a host of civil society organizations gathered the KAS offices in Johannesburg to kick-start the first of a series of African Civil Society Circle meetings. Proceedings were introduced and chaired by the representatives from GPPI, Dr. Julia Steets and Alexander Gaus. KAS provides funding for the Circle and a platform for such a group to convene on. The Circle’s purpose is to deliver recommendation on what issues to address and how to solve problems. Together the Circle will make recommendations and come to conclusions. The organizations that were invited were; the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AF-RODAD), Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA), the Democracy Development Program (DDP), Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Institute for Security Studies (ISS), the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), the Southern Africa Trust, and the Southern African Develop-

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August 2014

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ment Community Council of Non-Governmental Organizations (SADC-CNGO). Initially the participants were asked to introduce their organization and explain their expectations for the circle.

The ISS is involved in conflict analysis and prevention that does field research. The ISS would like to answer questions on operationalization of the network and of civil society as a collective.

The ACBF is a technical advisory service that operates in the following key areas; economic policy, financial administrative management, public governance, capacity for national government, and giving voices to civil society. They would like to see a sustainable think tank in Africa that produces collective action and presents a voice for policy advocacy.

The DDP plays the role of activating citizenship and good governance. The DDP would like to see the agenda of issues being brought closer to the people on the ground and developing a way in which things can be done differently and more effectively.

AFRODAD started its work on African Debt Collection and concessional aid. It hopes to find synergies to amplify voices through the Circle.

OXFAM focuses on issues that affect certain regions such as economic justice and governance.

The IPPR has three areas of focus; democracy and governance, public opinion, and the parliamentary monitoring program. IPPR hopes for information sharing with a checking system in place that ensures no abuse of information occurs.

The SADC-CNGO sees itself as a strategic civil society mediator. It would like to see all strengths in the circle harnessed and thus gain support from one another.

The Southern Africa Trust gives knowledge grants and technical support. It hopes to give technical support to SADC at regional poverty observers.

AISA as a member of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) focuses on policy advice for African context and the dissemination of information. AISA is hoping for a different approach to matters and to target the BRICS group. The HSRC would like to bridge the gap between policy and research.

Following from the introductions and sharing of expectations, Mike Hammond, Head of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in Southern Africa, presented a northern view on African and global development. Hammond explained how some Northern media still characterizes Africa as being dilapidated. He spoke about the issues facing the middle-income sphere in Africa; one being that this sphere has not been able to be defined due to the vast cultural and economic differences within communities. The representative spoke about the golden threads of development. Firstly, peace and security, which is necessary for the development of the country. Secondly, an open economy, i.e. accessible resources and free and fair trade, which will promote economic growth. And thirdly, an open society that acknowledges free expression, and human rights.

Outcomes and what the Future holds in store

After two days of hearty debate and discussions, it was mutually decided that the Circle would kick off its efforts by working on a position paper addressing the role and importance of good governance in the region. There was a strong cry for the need for education ranging from voters to the executive. This would be a long-term issue to look at and see where the Circle can actively be involved in amending the problem. It was also concluded that the organisations would make available the existing research that they had so that a common theme could be identified. A website would be a future option as a platform to present the information on. Moreover, the Circle wants to get publicity through media, this will be done through newspaper forums and online spaces. The next big forum is the Post-2015 Innovative Financing for Africa forum which the Circle would like to attend as a joint

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force to test the conglomerate. The main themes of the Africa Forum are domestic resource mobilisation, the illicit money flow, equality, and forming new partnerships. Here, the Circle intends to present the issue of good governance and plans to discuss the other topics in future position papers.

Concluding Remarks

All in all, the two day workshop proved to be fruitful. The next gathering is scheduled for November of 2014. Here it is hoped that each organization will have made progress on research, making available its resources and having developed a stand on the issue of good governance. The general feeling at the end of the workshop was one of togetherness and having established good relations with the other organizations. A sense of excitement to work together and have one common voice on regional issues also trended as the workshop drew to a close. It is hoped by all that eventually this Civil Society Circle will succeed in having a reach throughout Africa so that combined learning and sharing can develop.



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Impressum

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