

LAUNCHING of the Mauritius ECOSOCC
Tuesday 13th March 2007
Gold Crest Hotel, St Jean Road , Quatre Bornes
REPORT

The Mauritius ECOSOCC was launched by Hon. Madan Dooloo, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Cooperation, in the presence of Mr Charles Mutasa , Executive Director of AFRODAD who has been assigned the responsibility to help and constitute a strategy for setting up of National Chapters in the Southern Africa Region and Mr Paramasiva Chengan, Chairman of MACOSS on 13th March 2007, in the Conference Room of Gold Grest Hotel, St Jean Road, Quatre Bornes, Mauritius

1. Welcome Address by Mrs Manda Boolell

Mrs Manda Boolell, welcomed the Hon. Mr Madan Dooloo Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Cooperation, Mr Charles Mutasa, Executive Director of AFRODAD, Mr Paramasiva Chengan, Chairman MACOSS ,and all members of the ECOSOCC steering committee.

She informed that the process of establishing the Mauritius Chapter has started recently and the Civil Society organisation strongly believe on civil society contribution.

2. Overview of Mauritius AU ECOSOCC by Mr Paramasiva Chengan

Mr Paramasiva Chengan, Chairman of MACOSS welcomed the Hon. Minister Madan Dooloo , Mr Charles Mutasa and all members of the ECOSOCC steering committee.

He informed that following the Strategic Planning Meeting of ECOSOCC held in Harare responsibilities were assigned to all umbrella organisations to set up a national chapter in their region. The meeting also aimed to define requisite modalities and strategies for operationalising the ECOSOCC at the regional, sub regional, national and Diaspora levels.

He stated that at the Assembly of the African Union the establishment of the ECOSOCC was made under the provision of Articles 5 and 22 of the Constitutive Act and that emphasis was laid on popular participation in the activities of the African Union as it is a prerequisite for its success. Article 22 has provided space for CSO to play an important role through the ECOSOCC vehicle to make a link among the sectorial clusters. Therefore the need for civil society participation in AU matters is very crucial.

The ECOSOCC will be an advisory body of the African Union composed of different social and professional groups.

The roles of ECOSOCC members will be to

- (i) share information on ECOSOCC to all stakeholders
- (ii) establish a national co-ordination mechanisms for the purpose of popularization of ECOSOCC
- (iii) develop the modalities that would lead to the election of two CSO representatives to represent the country at the substantive ECOSOCC General Assembly ; and
- (iv) act as an observer/adviser and to see that all the engagement taken by the government at national and international level are being well undertaken.

He also stated that its time to change and the National ECOSOCC will be a common platform for coordinating all sectors without disturbing other established institutions. This National ECOSOCC will also be a people driven and people oriented .

Mr Chengan said that Mauritius AU ECOSOCC would be a coordination of all civil societies in Mauritius. It should work on a consultation background as there is a need to be transparent, accountable and democratic.

3. Address by Charles Mutasa – Executive Director,AFRODAD

Mr Charles Mutasa warmly welcomed all members to this AU consultative meeting on behalf of the AFRODAD board and secretariat, and on his own behalf,. He informed everyone that AFRODAD is deeply involved in the AU-CSO relations especially the process leading to the establishment of the AU ECOSOCC and that they are honoured to be the regional representative and facilitator of these important SADC ECOSOCC consultative meeting.

He showed his deep appreciation to all members for agreeing to be part of this meeting and specially the Minister of Foreign Affairs who besides other pressing duties has accepted this invitation. He also said that the presence of the Minister among us is of key importance to our efforts to launch an ECOSOCC chapter in Mauritius. He also thanked MACOSS for facilitating and putting up the logistics that have made this meeting possible as well as the civil society activists who have agreed to be part of the Mauritius ECOSOCC.

He stated that following the adoption of the African Union ECOSOCC statutes by the third Summit in Ethiopia in 2004, and the subsequent launch of the interim ECOSOCC Assembly on the 29th of March 2005 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, AFRODAD was elected to be the Southern Africa representative and one of the bureau members. The establishment of this important organ is to enable the African people and institutions, not only to contribute to the programmes and decisions of the AU, but also to assume ownership of these programmes and be responsible for their implementation. AFRODAD's mandate therefore involves mobilizing civil society in Southern Africa to fully and effectively engage with the African Union and its member states within Southern Africa on issues of concern to the citizens.

As a member of the interim ECOSOCC Bureau, with the support of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), AFRODAD convened a strategic meeting for regional and national umbrella organizations of SADC to draw a road map and strategic modalities of implementation. The ECOSOCC strategic meeting was held in April 2006 in Harare, Zimbabwe. The meeting provided a forum for CSOs to interrogate their participation in the ECOSOCC and also discuss modalities for their participation and their intended outcome from that participation. Upon the completion of the meeting, participants agreed that with the help of AFRODAD they would go and launch their national chapters. By the second half of 2006, having obtained financial support from the Southern Africa Trust (SAT) and Action Aid International, national ECOSOCC chapters were then launched in Zambia, Lesotho, Zimbabwe with a regional CSOs meeting convened in Johannesburg in early December 2006. More than 10 national ECOSOCC chapters are scheduled to be launched in the first half of 2007.

Much hope is also placed on ECOSOCC as a frame work for achieving the people driven AU and pulling our continent from marginalization, poverty, indebtedness, bad governance, conflict and economic quagmire. Our focus at this consultative meeting is to review progress made so far and to explore ways and means of moving this process forward in our SADC region and more importantly at national level. We would like to see ECOSOCC chapters in every AU member state in SADC. In line with this, it is also crucial that each of us here come out with some clear road map with regards to their envisaged/practical roles and obligations.

He also informed that AU through CSO participation in ECOSOCC seeks to address, in a clear and coherent manner, the key social, economic and political challenges facing our countries. The key importance is the acceptance by leaders of the responsibility to address these issues and their collective pledge to work with CSOs in meeting these objectives. A key and unique element in enacting of CSO participation in the AU charter that binds our leaders to promote, individually and collectively, the fundamental principles of the people's participation/popular participation with the sole objective of achieving good political and economic governance. The success of ECOSOCC will, of course, depend not only on African CSOs but also on the degree of support it gains from the governments/AU member states and the international community.

In his view, the success of ECOSOCC continues to depend on four key areas. First is the political will of our African leaders to the principles of political and economic governance which need to be respected. Second is the support ECOSOCC gets from civil society itself. Third is the ability to translate rhetoric into reality. The objectives and aspirations of ECOSOCC need to be translated into feasible programs that can get the support of the African people, sub-regional organizations and Africa's development partners. Fourth is the extent to which the international community will provide support.

He also hoped that the new partnership will increase development efforts reversing the decline we have witnessed in the past. Success of the new

partnership should benefit the average citizen and the marginalized in our communities as well as help attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

He concluded by stating the following: “ *The principles of ECOSOCC and our commitment to pursue them have raised high expectations both in our countries and among our development partners. We cannot assume that things are moving without us reviewing, analyzing and critiquing them from time to time. Towards this end we should continue mobilizing support from all our stakeholders in our countries*”

4. Address by Hon. Madan Dulloo, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Cooperation.

The Hon Minister put forward that the role of African civil society in the development of Africa has been recognized for a very long time. This awareness is based on the fundamental premise that Africa's development must be about people in other words, putting people first. In fact as early 1990, the Arusha Charter on Popular Participation emphasized the need for African civil society to be fully involved in the various structures of key institutions. This is how you can shape in a significant way the development agenda of the continent.

The creation of the African Union was a turning point in the elaboration of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) as one of the main AU Organs – a kind of think tank to give advice and recommendations for inclusion in the decision-making processes of the African Union. The establishment of the Interim ECOSOCC in March 2005, under the provisions of Article 5 and 22 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, allows Civil Society to gain a direct say in proposing solutions to improve the lives of its citizens.

Now that we have such a formidable instrument at our disposal, where do we go from here? We must look at the benefits that can be derived from such an institution. We must ensure that its activities and programs will improve the quality of people's lives and raise their standards of living. The ECOSOCC will succeed if it can reach people, listen to them and reflect their preoccupations at home and throughout the continent. First and foremost, the ECOSOCC must be a people-driven institution. For the ECOSOCC to deliver and achieve results, each National ECOSOCC member must interact purposefully within the country and then play its meaningful role at the level of the Continent through the framework of the ECOSOCC's General Assembly.

The Government would welcome the National ECOSOCC as a privileged partner in tackling in a coordinated manner the various problems confronting the nation in those challenging times. The dedicated reservoir of human resources within the National ECOSOCC constitutes an invaluable asset in addressing and seeking practical solutions to societal issues, such as gender, human rights, poverty alleviation, education, security, protection of the environment and healthcare amongst others. In this regard, as you know Mauritius is undertaking, under the aegis of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), its self-assessment report under the NEPAD African Peer

Review Mechanism. The document once completed will provide an objective evaluation in the four core areas reviewed under the APRM, namely:

- a. Political and Democratic Governance
- b. Economic Governance and Management
- c. Corporate Governance and
- d. Socio-economic Development

The National ECOSOCC would be expected to provide its inputs and analysis on the important aspects covered by the report. The establishment of a mechanism which facilitates interaction between Government and the National ECOSOCC should thus be encouraged.

But the responsibilities of the Mauritius ECOSOCC go far beyond the national sphere. The ECOSOCC is an ideal springboard for various stakeholders from the civil society sector to make their voices heard at the various levels of the African Union's Organs.

Civil Society Organisations are now active participants in the various institutions of the AU, not only the ECOSOCC. Important Organs like the Pan African Parliament, the African Court of Justice, the Specialised Committees, among others, are all required to involve Civil Society Organisations in their work. As an Advisory Organ, the ECOSOCC is mandated to contribute to peace and security, development and prosperity in the Continent. Its encompassing role compels it to relate to the several main Organs of the African Union. And hence, its statutory involvement with the General Assembly of the ECOSOCC, where its voice will be heard at the highest level of the African Union.

Therefore, ECOSOCC Mauritius has to act at two levels, namely at the national level and the continental level. The Minister assured that the Government is going to be an active partner and listen to advice on pertinent issues affecting Mauritius and the Continent. He thanked all members of the Steering Committee, more particularly their organizations for their commitment. He also said that he encourage and give all his support required at this initial stage. He specially command the vital role of AFRODAD and MACOSS for acting as facilitators and coordinators.

He stated that his Ministry is at the disposal of Mauritius ECOSOCC and have much pleasure and honour to launch the National ECOSOCC Chapter. He wished ECOSOCC Mauritius plenty of success in tackling the huge tasks ahead.

5. An Overview/Analysis of NGOS, Government and Intergovernmental bodied by Sheila Bunwaree, Lecturer from the University of Mauritius

Mrs Bunwaree said that first of all there is a need to conceptualise what is meant by NGOs and CSOs in Mauritius.

5.1 Democracy/NEPAD

She stated that democracy is the promotion of the quality of life of all people irrespective of everything about rights; rights to shelter, human rights etc.

Mutations therefore have direct impact to human rights. There is a thinking ideology emerging out of new partnership of African development. Thus there exist a kind of platform for development purposes namely NEPAD.

NEPAD is a kind of promise to get some continents to share experiences with regions. NEPAD had been heavily criticised but not with a view of rejecting it but as to how best:

- to make it human phased with enhancing capabilities
- freedom from a number of problems
- based on a number of philosophy (of new liberalism) which is the ideology of the market
- to deal with growing poverty in Africa
- to deal with the obsession with economic growth and jobless growth

5.2 Problems in Mauritius

There are problems occurring regarding economic growth and jobless growth as a result of closures of firms and industries and there is also erosion of welfare state

In Mauritius, regardless of the macro-economic, the notion of civil society is viewed as fractured and not united; which shows that it is indeed very weak.

Some structures in Mauritius are failing. This could be due to the fact we are heavily depending on the State, there could also be a lack of a legal framework or there are internal dynamics blocking us somewhere which affects instead of helping civil society.

This could also be due to globalisation as there is no room for civil society to manoeuvre and thus it would be the State's responsibility. On the other hand, African people came up with a charter in order to fight against the said problems as if a civil society is fractured or if we would be dependent on the State, then we would not be able to express our views. This would be a weakness as there is a lack of advocacy role of civil society.

She also informed that several meetings were convened in civil society pointing to good governance, socio-economic governance and corporate governance. However, the completing of this exercise has been unsuccessful. Therefore, to deal with this situation, a new body called National Economic and Social Council has been set up. A report by MACOSS has been presented to NESC, and the process is now being reviewed.

5.3 Way forward

Therefore in order to deal with all the above-mentioned problems, there is a need to make the ECOSOCC chapter in Mauritius fruitful so that civil society would stop being voiceless and powerless. This can only be done when all the CSO organisations work together in a common platform. Some NGOS that exist in Mauritius work only in their domain and thus they do not contribute to the macro-environment. However, now its time to work in networking and united so as to have better result. The networking will help to tackle and assist those voiceless and powerless. There is a necessity for coherence and strategy so that initiatives are fruitful

In order to so achieve the objectives of the ECOSOCC, we have to adopt the 3 C's:

- (i) Commitment
- (ii) Coherence
- (iii) Coordination

The effectiveness of the NGOs also depend on

- (i) resources to promote different NGO's
- (ii) capacity building of NGO's
- (iii) NGO training advocacy on macro economic issues

And the way to move forward will be

- (i) to consider the ethno politics with the State
- (ii) to take the advantage from being a small state for as being small would mean we can address problems properly and it would also be less costly.
- (iii) to consider for a right balance between youth and others
- (iv) to consider /need for a proper audit to ensure moving forward in a positive way
- (v) to set up an NGO Training Academy

6. The Presentation of AU-ECOSOC Agenda by Charles Mutasa

6.1 National Process

- Strategic planning meeting with umbrella national NGOs in Harare (April 2006)
- Supported by American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
- Set up regional steering committee
- June-December 2006
- Zambia National consultations launched
- Lesotho national consultations lounged alongside SADC summit
- Zimbabwe national process launched

- Mozambique provincial outreach
- Namibia, Angola & the islands consultations/ launches postponed to 2007
- Malawi still to confirm preferred consultation dates.
- Still to sort out SA national Chapter Vs AU-ECOSOCC version

6.2 The Regional CSOs Process

- 3 meetings to target regional CSOs consultations in the region
- South Africa consultations held in Joburg end of November 2006
- Supported by Action Aid International & Southern Africa Trust
- Challenges/Lessons
- More funds required to jump-start and sustain process.
- Inactive interim assembly members plus transfers/job shifts
- Information dissemination & inclusiveness
- NGOs skepticism & pessimism of ECOSOCC
- Engaging the media
- Sluggishness on members
- AU contributions late in coming
- Critique of Statutes and call for revisions

6.3 Looking Ahead

- More national launches (10 out of 14 countries) of the process in the first quarter of 2007
- Elections of national & sub-regional representatives between April & June 2007
- More fund-raising efforts for national and regional CSO reps

6.4 Recommendations

- Try to engage Govt as you do this process.
- Take note of the Statutes deficits/shortfalls as you consult but avoid revising.
- Consolidate pre-summit meetings outcomes
- Link up with other processes like APRM, MDGs, NEPAD & observances of elections
- Missions to troubled spots like Darfur
- Speak up on continental issues
- Take charge of the pre-summit meetings than leave it entirely to CIDO
- Our website (within the presiding officer's office) needs support
- We need to strategize and plan for World Social Forum, January 2007
- CIDO-ECOSOCC secretariat links should be well-structured for effective progress.
- We should make use of NGOs Explo/convention
- Use community radios/national TVs
- Explo use of list-serves.

7. Presentation of the Mauritius ECOSOCC Consitution by Dr N. S. Bosoondoyal – Chairperson of the Mauritius Chapter’s constitution drafting Committee

Mr Bosoondoyal informed that a drafting of constitution committee has been set up under his chairmanship and several meetings have been held to draft rules and regulations and to set up an organigram. After several weeks of deliberation, and after the meeting with Mr.Charles Mutasa , the team make up of different CSO from around the country working on the drafting of the MAURITIUS AU ECOSOCC Constitution have come up with a framework that will help us to go forward with the MAURITIUS AU ECOSOCC Chapter.

He presented the Main frame of MAURITIUS AU ECOSOCC . He also said that the constitution of an NGO contains various articles which start firstly with the Denomination –Duration – Seal, Secondly with the Seat, and here he has the honor to give a brief apercu from the working group on the major part of the constitution in connection with articles of **Objectives and Memberships**.

Our main objectives and membership categories with requirement shall be as follows:

7.1 ARTICLE 3: OBJECTS of the MAURITIUS AFRICAN - UNION ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COUNCIL.

Mauritius AU ECOSOCC, shall have its main objectives as follows: It shall amongst other things, and in conformity of the objectives of the African Union as provided in the Constitutive Act and as per the Statues of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council, perform the following:

1. To sensitize, popularize and to promote the ECOSOCC of the African Union;
2. Promote continuous dialogue between all segments of the Mauritian People on issues concerning Africa and its future;
3. Forge strong partnerships between government and all segments of the civil society, in particular women, the youth, children, organized labour, the private sector and professional groups;
4. Promote the participation of Mauritian Civil Society in the implementation of the policies and programmes of the African Union;
5. Support policies and programmes that will promote peace, security and stability in Mauritius as well as in Africa, and foster development and integration of the nation and of the continent;

6. Promote and defend a culture of good governance, democratic principles and institutions, popular participation, human rights and freedoms as well as social justice;
7. Promote, advocate and defend a culture of gender equality;
8. Promote and strengthen the institutional, human and operational capacities of the Mauritian-African civil society;
9. To work, bring awareness, suggest prevention and to formulate opinions and provide inputs into the following:
 - a. **Peace and Security:** (Conflict Anticipation; prevention; management and resolution; post-conflict reconstruction and peace building; prevention and combating of terrorism; use of child soldiers; drug trafficking; illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons and security reforms, etc).
 - b. **Political Affairs:** (Human Rights; Rule of Law; Democratic and Constitutional Rule, Good Governance; Power Sharing; Electoral institutions; Humanitarian Affairs and Assistance, etc).
 - c. **Infrastructure and Energy:** (Energy; Transport; Communications; Infrastructure and Tourism, etc).
 - d. **Social Affairs and Health:** (Health; HIV/AIDS; Children, Drug Control; Population; Migration; Labour and Employment; Family; Aging; the physically challenged, sports; culture; youth and protection and social integration, etc).
 - e. **Human Resources, Science and Technology:** (Education; Illiteracy Information Technology; Communication; Human Resources; Science and Technology, etc).
 - f. **Trade and Industry:** (trade; Industry; Handcrafts; Customs and Immigration Matters, etc).
 - g. **Rural Economy and Agriculture:** (Rural Economy; Agriculture and Food Security; Livestock; Environment; Water and Natural Resources and Desertification, etc).
 - h. **Economic Affairs:** (Economic integration; Monetary and Financial Affairs; Private Sector Development including the informal sector and Resource Mobilization, etc).
 - i. **Women and Gender:** (Women; Gender and Development as a crosscutting issue, etc).
 - j. **Other Cross-Cutting Programmes:** (Those in relation to African concerned and development).
10. To Affiliate with the ECOSOCC of the African Union
11. To work, cooperate and affiliate with other national, regional and international bodies.

7.2 ARTICLE 4: MEMBERSHIP:

1. Membership of the Mauritius AU ECOSOCC is open to any Registered entities and may be from the following categories:

- (a) Social groups such as those representing women, children, the youth, the elderly and people with disability and special needs;
- (b) Professional groups such as associations of artists, engineers, health practitioners, social workers, media, teachers, sport associations, legal professionals, social scientists, academia, business organizations, national chambers of commerce, workers, employers, industry and agriculture as well as other private sector interest groups;
- (c) Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs) and voluntary organizations;
- (d) Cultural organizations and other civil society groups.

Other articles will be based as per the requirement of the Registry of Association in virtue of the Registrar of Association Act Section 30 regarding the registration of association regulation in Mauritius.

The rest of article 4, section 2 to 5 and all remaining articles will be taken up when we move on the final touch of the constitution or at the next sitting.

8. Meeting with Other NGOs and Stakeholders

A meeting with other NGOs and Stakeholders was held on the same day where the outcomes of the meeting were presented to them. Around 60 members attended this meeting

9. Press Conference

A Press Conference was also held where all the medias were invited . Please find attached Press articles