

# **The African Union and People's Participation**

**An analysis  
By Charles Mutasa**



**African Forum and Network  
on Debt and Development**

# About AFRODAD

## AFRODAD Vision

AFRODAD aspires for an equitable and sustainable development process leading to a prosperous Africa.

## AFRODAD Mission

To secure policies that will redress the African debt crisis based on a human rights value system.

AFRODAD Objectives include the following:

- 1 To enhance efficient and effective management and use of resources by African governments;
- 2 To secure a paradigm shift in the international socio-economic and political world order to a development process that addresses the needs and aspirations of the majority of the people in the world.
- 3 To facilitate dialogue between civil society and governments on issues related to Debt and development in Africa and elsewhere.

From the vision and the mission statements and from our objectives, it is clear that the Debt crisis, apart from being a political, economic and structural issue, has an intrinsic link to human rights. This forms the guiding philosophy for our work on Debt and the need to have African external debts cancelled for poverty eradication and attainment of social and economic justice. Furthermore, the principle of equity must of necessity apply and in this regard, responsibility of creditors and debtors in the debt crisis should be acknowledged and assumed by the parties. When this is not done, it is a reflection of failure of governance mechanisms at the global level that protect the interests of the weaker nations. The Transparent Arbitration mechanism proposed by AFRODAD as one way of dealing with the debt crisis finds a fundamental basis in this respect.

AFRODAD aspires for an African and global society that is just (equal access to and fair distribution of resources), respects human rights and promotes popular participation as a fundamental right of citizens (Arusha Declaration of 1980). In this light, African society should have the space in the global development arena to generate its own solutions, uphold good values that ensure that its development process is owned and driven by its people and not dominated by markets/profits and international financial institutions.

AFRODAD is governed by a Board of seven people from the five regions of Africa, namely East, Central, West, Southern and the North. The Board meets twice a year. The Secretariat, based in Harare, Zimbabwe, has a staff compliment of Seven programme and five support staff.

The African Union and People's Participation: An analysis

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## Acknowledgements

AFRODAD wishes to acknowledge their great debt of gratitude to the Southern African People's Solidarity Network (SAPSN) through Patricia Kasiamhuru, its Director and our partner the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) for commissioning this Occasional Paper, under which this title was first published. We thank them for their kind permission to reprint it as an AFRODAD publication.

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## List of Abbreviations

AU	African Union
AEC	African Economic Community
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSSDCA	Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa
ECOSOCC	Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the Union
NEPAD	New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PAP	Pan African Parliament
REC	Regional Economic Community

## 1.0 Introduction

"Democracy is an ideal that I would like to live for, it is an ideal that if necessary I am prepared to die for" - Nelson Mandela.

It is a true and undeniable fact that the inclusion of people in the affairs of the African Union is an intriguing and powerful idea that has sunk into the minds of African leaders and there is no shadow of doubt that now there is a growing understanding that the political leadership alone cannot determine the continent's destiny. There is much comprehension that there is not much resonance in having regional structures and meetings among the political leadership without the backing of the people. It is now common language that top-down approaches emanating from the razzmatazz of summits without the people will not change the face of Africa-people need to be masters of their own destiny. There exists today a rich body of literature emphasizing the rights based approach to development grounded in ownership and effective participation by the intended beneficiaries. The African Union cannot afford to remain an exception to the norm.

The African Heads of States and Governments, to a large extent, demonstrated the need for a people-centered African Union when they agreed to enshrine provisions in the African Union constitution for a Pan African Parliament that consequently led to its establishment in March 2004. Further to this, the Third Summit of the African Union held in Addis Abba, Ethiopia in the second week of July 2004 saw African leaders opening their arms to the effective formal participation of the wider civil society organizations (CSOs) in Africa and the Diaspora by approving the Statutes of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC). To implement this, in March 2005, the world also saw the establishment of ECOSOCC in line with the provisions of Articles 5 and 22 of the African Union Constitutive Act.

It remains to be seen whether constitutional provisions and establishment of these entities is a confirmation and assurance that popular participation in the activities of the African Union (AU) is guaranteed, as enunciated in the African Charter for Popular Participation. The central issue of the AU was not the institutions and structures, which are but the vehicles through which Africans express their common concerns; rather, the central issue is the manner of interaction and cooperation among African people.

Although the AU has clearly stated its commitment to participatory practices and constructive engagement with civil society, a number of issues need to be addressed if popular participation in the African Union is to be successful. To this end this paper seeks to trace and give a critical appraisal of the events, mechanisms, dynamics and reasons leading to the involvement of the citizenry in the affairs of the African Union. The purpose of the participation is conceived from the fact that the continental body needs to be people-driven rather than been driven from a top-bottom approach as its predecessor the Organization of the African Unity. The paper will also endeavor to give recommendations on how to carry further these noble ideas and initiatives to their logical conclusion.

## 2.0 The concept of people/civil society in Africa

The concept of civil society is understood differently across different historical periods and depending upon ideological viewpoints and socio-cultural contexts. However, the social realm includes non-governmental organizations (NGOs), people's organizations, trade unions, human rights groups, and policy activist bodies, associations of business and professional people's organizations and so forth. All these may be found in the domain called civil space and thus are called civil society [1]. For the purposes of this paper the word "people" will be substituted by the use of "civil society organizations" - both formal and informal.

Generally civil society means a voluntary expression of the interests and aspirations of citizens organized and united by common interests, goals, values or traditions, and mobilized into collective action either as beneficiaries or stakeholders of the development process [2]. Though civil society stands apart from state and market forces, it is not necessarily in basic contradiction to them, and it ultimately influences and is influenced by both. With the birth of the African Union in 2002, it has become important for CSOs not to be observers of the AU proceedings but be an integral part of the organization's decision and policymaking process.

The AU has been described as neither a completely new institution, nor a mere change of name, but rather as an enhanced framework for closer interaction and integration among the peoples of Africa. It was within this framework that an entry point was provided for CSOs to assist in the realization of the AU's objectives. These objectives include:

- a) Promoting peace, security and stability and democracy on the continent;
- b) Removing barriers for closer interaction among African peoples;
- c) Combating the challenges of poverty and marginalization; and strengthening an African identity

It is important to point out that not every organization in civil society necessarily plays a positive role or reflects genuine associational life that is relevant to the AU's mandate. Some lack positive purposes or authenticity, or both. Moreover, civil society is not necessarily a place of harmony, autonomy and independence. There are bad instances where civil society organizations have been used as conveyor belts of certain foreign or political interests. Having said this one must hastily point out that such occasions are very rare as many civic groups are born with a desire to achieve certain objectives for the local communities, which in most cases donors only come to supplement those efforts rather than undermine. Competition and destructive conflict can take place in this realm. [3] By the same token, civil society can serve as a place to vent grievances, open channels of communication and thus to build a basis for social harmony. Recognizing and nurturing these potentials, but at the same time being selective among civil society organizations, and being strategic in crafting partnership with them are important challenges for the AU.

## 3.0 Background and context

The role of African civil society in the development of Africa has been recognized for a long time. This is based on the fundamental premise that Africa's development must be about development of people. As early as 1990, the Arusha Charter on Popular Participation recognized the need for African governance to fully integrate African civil society in various governance structures of key institutions in order for them to fully participate in defining the long-term development policies of the continent. While the charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) had made no reference to African civil society, the OAU increasingly began to invite African Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to participate in some of its meetings and structures as observers.

Past Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) approaches to cooperation with CSOs included the criteria for observer status and outlined essential prerequisites. In cases where observer status was not possible, cooperation agreements or Memorandums of Understanding could still be concluded as internal mechanisms for cooperation in specific areas. The observers' status criterion was adopted in 1968 by the OAU and amended in 1993 and further amended in 1996. Initially the concept of being granted observer status required an organization to be African, with majority African membership, and wholly African financed.

The change in 1996 was from "wholly" financed requirement to "mostly" because of the challenges faced by African CSOs to get financing. CSOs required submitting applications six months before the Ministerial Meeting. Applications had to be accompanied by financial statements, the organization had to be continental, and five countries should be willing to support application status. There were also categories: A for government in exile; B: Intergovernmental organizations; C: NGOs, labour unions and other. It is important to note that there were some serious limitations inherent in the OAU framework as it did not allow for direct participation of CSO representatives at the meetings and had no reporting or follow-up systems.

The programme of reform and renewal that the secretary general of the OAU submitted to the sessions of the Council of Ministers and the Summit of the Heads of State and Government in Harare in July 2000 adopted the solemn declaration on the Conference on Security, Stability, development and Cooperation (CSSDCA), which provided for the views of civil society to be conveyed to the CSSDCA Standing Conference, scheduled to meet every two years during the OAU annual summits. As if that was not enough, at Sirte and in Lusaka Summits that followed, Heads of State and Government agreed that broader consultation was necessary. This raised the question: how many people are to be engaged, sensitized and activated on a regular basis in the process of building the Union?

## 4.0 The African Union and its Organs

The African Union is a successor of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) which was established on 25 May 1963. Following the Sirte Extraordinary Session of the Heads of State and Governments, calls were strong for the establishment of the African Union to succeed the OAU. The 2000 Lome Summit heads of state and governments adopted the Constitutive Act of the Union while the Lusaka Summit (2001) drew the road map for the implementation of the AU and the Durban Summit (2002) saw the launch of the AU. As with its predecessor, the OAU, the African Union is based in Addis Abba, Ethiopia.

There are a number of key different organs of the AU that have been established. Decision making in the AU begins with issues being put forward to the Secretariat who then hand them over to the member states' ambassadors to the African Union for their first stage consideration. The ambassadors will then hand it over to the Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers of member states, who also reconsider the matter as coming from the ambassadors. The final stage of approval or disapproval will be the Summit of the Heads of State and Governments.

A brief explanation of these organs of the AU is important as the Union cannot function without them - the Assembly, the Executive Council and the Commission. The Assembly of Heads of State and Government is the supreme organ of the Union composed of Heads of State and Heads of Government of member states. It is the most important decision-making body of the African Union and meets twice a year to make its decisions by consensus or by a two-thirds majority. [4] The Executive Council is composed of Ministers of Foreign Affairs or External Affairs designated by the Heads of States or Governments of members' states. The Executive Council is responsible to the Assembly. The Commission is composed of the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson, eight Commissioners and staff members. Each Commissioner is responsible for a portfolio. The Commission is responsible for the administrative responsibilities of running other institutions of the AU.

The Permanent Representatives' Committee is composed of Permanent Representatives of Member States (member states' ambassadors to the African Union) accredited to the Union and is charged with the responsibility of preparing the work of the Executive Council. Other vital organs of the AU include the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the Pan-African Parliament which is responsible for legislative and policy making issues, but currently for the first five years playing an advisory role and being watchdog by ensuring that the AU lives up to its decisions and promises to the people. Another important organ of the AU is the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) which is the civil society advisory organ to the AU. Important and worth mentioning is the organ of the Union that is related to the people is the Court of Justice.

Besides having important organs that make it people-centered there are also specialized technical committees of the AU designed to address sectoral issues. Members of civil society are expected to contribute to the success of the union by adding value to the work of these committees.

This implies that those working in certain key thematic areas related to a particular committee have to take it upon themselves to see that the committee carries with it their input.

Some of these committees are:

- The Committee on Rural Economy and Agricultural Matters;
- The Committee on Monetary and Financial Affairs;
- The Committee on Trade, Customs and Immigration Matters;
- The Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, Energy, Natural Resources and Environment;
- The Committee on Transport, Communications and Tourism;
- The Committee on Health, Labour and Social Affairs; and
- The Committee on Education, Culture and Human Resources.

These have been established to provide space to people specialized in certain sectors to help work with them and uplift the standard of the AU's programmes and activities. More information on the AU's organs and committees are much elaborated in the Constitutive Act of the Africa Union (see Appendix 2)

## 5.0 The African Union and Civil Society

The OAU's Assembly of Heads of State and Government Decision AHG Dec. 160 (XXXII) of July 2001 in Lusaka, stressed the importance of involving African Non-governmental Organizations, socio-economic organizations, professional associations and civil society organizations in Africa's integration process, as well as in the formulation and implementation of the programme of the African Union. In that same decision, the Assembly requested the Interim Chairperson of the AU, in consultation with a group of experts and CSO Working Group Representatives to submit a comprehensive report during its 2003 Maputo Summit on ECOSOCC with recommendations on:

1. Its structure, functioning, areas of competence and relationships to other organs of the Union;
2. The procedure and criteria for selecting the members of ECOSOCC, including their terms of office;
3. The relationship between ECOSOCC and African regional non-governmental organizations and professional groups;
4. The Rules of Procedure of ECOSOCC and the preparations of its work programme.

In line with this, two large civil society meetings were convened by the African Union in Addis Ababa in June 2001 and 2002 respectively. The Conferences were organized against the background of the importance and value that the OAU attaches to the involvement of African Civil Society in the fulfilment of its objectives as articulated in various policy documents, particularly the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA). Apart from this it was also for improving and consolidating the collaboration between the OAU and CSOs in Africa, as well as 'to assist in promoting a home-grown African Civil Society and enhance its contribution to the fulfilment of the Union's mission.'

Following the second large civil society meeting in June 2002, a civil society working group of 20 people was elected to help the African Union develop some modalities which would help govern the working relations between the African Union and civil society. Thus the provisional working group was mandated to work with the African Union Secretariat and achieve the following:

- Preparing criteria for accreditation and affiliation of African Civil Society organizations across the continent.
- Participate in the formulation of possible modalities relating to the participation of civil society in ECOSOCC and other relevant AU organs. ECOSOCC is an advisory organ of the Union consisting of a variety of civil society groups from member states. These included professional groups, non-governmental organizations, social groups, community based organizations, workers, traditional, religious and cultural groups. This was established under the provisions of Article 5 and 22 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union.
- Develop a Code of Conduct and Ethics for CSOs

- Assist the AU in the elaboration of a plan of action relating to CSO activities and contributions to the OAU/AU and forging networks.
- Assist in resource mobilization and popularize the AU.

To that effect, it was agreed that the working group should within two years come up with an accreditation criteria and a Code of Ethics that should be applied to all civil society groups wishing to engage with the African Union. It must be pointed out here that the Code of ethics was not a formulation by the governments or the African Union but the civil society organizations themselves introduced the idea as they sought to safeguard against individuals or groups that do not have a constituency and masquerade as having one, and yet they are seeking personal interests.

The first meeting of the Group was in Accra, Ghana in October 2002 in which the first draft of the (ECOSOCC) statutes were drawn up and submitted to the AU Commission by the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa Unit (CSSDCA). Efforts to get the statutes approved in the second African Union Summit held in July 2003 in Maputo, Mozambique were futile as many stakeholders both in civic organizations and government had not had a chance to study or know more about the statutes. The following twelve months were therefore devoted to convening national and sub-regional workshops to popularize and mobilize support for the ECOSOCC. The last meeting of the working group held in Cairo, Egypt in March 2004 consolidated all ideas and agreed to submit the revised version of the ECOSOCC for adoption by the Third Summit of the African Union.

Following the adoption of the African Union ECOSOCC statutes by the Third Summit in Ethiopia in 2004, the interim ECOSOCC was launched on the 29 March 2005 in Addis Abba, Ethiopia. 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. This has now been extended to participation in various other institutions and committees such as the African Parliament, the African Court of Justice, the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation (CSSDCA) and specialized Committees, all of which are required to involve CSOs in their work.

## 6.0 The importance of civil society

The role of civil society organizations as grassroots agents of mobilization for the processes of economic development is widely acknowledged. As noted above the OAU/AU has been engaged with African Civil Society Organizations for many years and it attaches great importance to the role of African Civil Society organizations in its efforts to promote development and foster democratic renewal on the continent. The rule of law, governmental accountability, peace and security are key to the social, economic and political development of Africa. All of these require, as a necessary condition for their success, a strong and autonomous civil society. The importance of civil society in making Africa a more humane continent is everywhere apparent, and its growth over the last decade has been an important part of advances on the continent.

Civil Society is a potential resource-base yet to be tapped by the political powers but it is also the mechanism by which their own governance shall be weighed. Civil Society is a reservoir of human knowledge that should be taken seriously in building African economies. Greater popular participation in government is a prerequisite for stability on the continent - particularly since governance is often weak, corruption endemic and democracy in a number of countries little more than a facade [5]. Civil society organizations have played critical roles in the search for peace in conflict-ridden areas such as Angola, the Sudan and the Mano River Union. In resolving all the problems associated with Debt, Trade and Aid engaging civil society is not an option but a necessity.

Here one might want to cite the work of the African humanitarian group which has done extensive work in conflict-ridden areas. It is also very clear that civil society organizations have a critical role to play in the process of post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation in African societies that have experienced the trauma of war. The maintenance of peace and security requires the support and active participation of Civil Society. Civil society organizations have the ability to reach out the grass root level people in the African communities and they have many times complemented state efforts in people's social welfare. While NGOs in the past have concentrated on service delivery. Many more are now engaged in social mobilization and advocacy. Many have been serving as a bridge between local communities and government. Most donors have begun to regard them as alternative effective ways of reaching the poor and a mechanism of channelling a sizeable percentage of donor funds.

"The deficiencies in democratic accountability and public administration have left gaps, some of which have been filled by NGOs."

It is common knowledge that a 'constipated and bureaucratic African state' has been assisted by non-governmental organizations' work in rural development and other charitable spheres. Involving civil society organizations is key considering the role they would be expected to play as watchdogs of their governments; guardians of democratic practices as well as ensuring the implementation of peace and conflict resolution efforts

Civil society has been instrumental in advocacy, engaged in policy dialogue and sector analysis, conducted independent research and shared valuable information on sustainable and economic development.

Civil society organizations hold both national governments and donors accountable to promises they make in international, regional and national fora. Currently, CSOs are working with both international development agencies and local governments in ensuring that a lot of effort is put towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. For most governments, this implies a radical shift-focused on strategies and a deliberate resource allocation geared towards improving human life.

## 7.0 The African Union ECOSOCC

Article 22 of the founding charter of the African Union defines African civil society as an advisory organ and explicitly invites African civil society through its various organizations to fully participate in the institutions of the Union, in particular, the Economic and Social Council. This has now been extended to participation in various other institutions and committees such as the African Parliament, the African Court of Justice, the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation (CSSDCA) and specialized Committees, all of which are required to involve CSOs in their work.

The ECOSOCC Statutes define ECOSOCC as an advisory body to all the AU's components and organs. It also spells out its structure, functioning, areas of competence and relationships to other organs of the Union. It also specifies the procedure and criteria for membership to ECOSOCC, term of office, its composition, formation; objectives, and the relationship between ECOSOCC and African regional non-governmental organizations and professionals. (See Appendix 1)

Important to note in the Statutes is that ECOSOCC shall be composed of one 150 CSOs that shall include different social and professional groups in member states. There shall be two CSOs from each member state of the union, 10 CSOs operating at regional level; eight at continental level and 20 CSOs from the Diaspora and six CSOs in ex-officio capacity, nominated by the Commission based on considerations in consultations with member states.

The elections of the members of ECOSOCC at member state, regional and continental levels shall ensure 50 percent gender equality and shall also consider having 50 percent of the elected members as youths between the ages of 18 to 35. CSOs themselves shall define the modalities for elections and procedures of operation.

The ECOSOCC shall have four key structures/hierarchy of authority. The highest decision and policymaking structure of ECOSOCC shall be the General Assembly, which will be composed of all its 150 members. The assembly approves all activities, committees, membership and budgetary issues. Below it is the Standing Committee composed of 18 members mandated to coordinate ECOSOCC activities. Third are the 10 sectoral cluster committees that are the key operational mechanisms of ECOSOCC to formulate opinions and provide inputs into the policies and programmes of the African Union.

Each member of ECOSOCC will have to work with a sectoral cluster committee in accordance to its expertise i.e. peace and security; political affairs; social affairs and health; human resources, science and technology; trade and industry, rural economy and agriculture; economic affairs, women and gender, and crosscutting programmes such as HIV/AIDS and NEPAD. The last structure of ECOSOCC is the five-member Credentials Committee, which will be in charge of examining credentials for membership.

## 7.1 The Interim African Union ECOSOCC

The ECOSOCC process is a historical opportunity for the formulation of a new social contract between African Governments and their people. Putting aside the usual misgivings in any process involving CSOs in African Union endeavors is a positive move and is a way of involving ordinary citizens of Africa in decision and policy-making processes of issues that concern their daily lives.

ECOSOCC is headed by a Bureau of five regional representatives, a Standing Committee and then the general assembly of 150 members. The Bureau is headed and chaired by the illustrious, astute and erudite Nobel laureate, Professor Wangari Mathai who is also the Presiding Officer and East Africa representative. Deputy Presiding Officers are: Professor Maurice Tadadjeu (Central Africa); Dr. Ayo Aderinwale (West Africa); Prof. Fatima Karadja (North Africa) and Mr. Charles Mutasa (Southern Africa).

The mandate of the interim ECOSOCC is two years from March 2005 to March 2007. It is interim in the sense that all its national and regional structures have not yet be fully constituted. The two major tasks for the interim ECOSOCC are therefore: first is to ensure that ECOSOCC sub-regional and national structures are in place. Secondly, through ECOSOCC, civil society must begin influencing policy changes within the African Union by engaging the sectoral clusters of the African Union namely: peace and security; political affairs; infrastructure and energy; human resources, science and technology; rural economy and agriculture; economic affairs, women and gender related issues and cross-cutting issues such as NEPAD.

In the words of His Excellency Mr. Alpha Oumar Konare, Chairman of the African Union Commission ECOSOCC, "the creation of ECOSOCC is against authoritarian regimes, hostile external efforts and the negative waves of globalization.... You should be by the side of those who suffer injustice and are deprived of their basic human rights." [6] Thus ECOSOCC is viewed in this sense as the solid foundation of democracy; expected to guarantee the observance of the rule of law, human rights, democratic transformation and good governance. It is also envisaged that it is through ECOSOCC that civil society in Africa has to define itself and prove to skeptics that they are not the conveyor belts of western interests.

## 8.0 The Pan African Parliament (PAP)

In order to ensure the full participation of African peoples in the development and economic integration of the continent, the AU constitutive Act invited Parliamentarians to take a pivotal role in the architecture of the Union through the Pan African Parliament. On 18 March 2004, the former Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano, who was then the current AU chairman, swore in 202 legislators from 41 countries. The first act of the new deputies was to elect Ms. Gertrude Mongella of Tanzania as president of the Parliament. They also elected four vice presidents: Mr. Fernando Dias Van-Dünen of Angola, Dr. Mohammed Lutfi Farahat of Libya, Ms. Elise Loum of Chad and Mr. Jerome Sacca Kina Guezere of Benin.

"If we really want to call this a people's parliament, we have to find the mechanism to bring in civil society". Gertrude Mongella, Pan African Parliament President

According to the protocol establishing the Parliament, it will provide "a common platform for African peoples and their grassroots organizations to be more involved in discussions and decision-making on the problems and challenges facing the continent." During its first five years, the Parliament will be an advisory body, but the ultimate goal is to accord it full legislative powers, with members directly elected. Each country signing and ratifying the protocol gets five Parliamentary deputies, one of which must be a woman.

PAP provides a basis for the integration of regional policy initiatives into national legislations that in effect, gives the parliamentarians a critical role in the overall policy implementation process. The PAP, like ECOSOCC, is expected to play a crucial role in protecting human rights, consolidating democratic institutions and popularizing and promoting good governance. The Parliament is also expected to offer hope for a new era of transparency and accountability in African politics as opposition parties will be given official space in continental politics with opportunities to create alliances to exert pressure on autocratic governments.

## 9.0 Opportunities

The resolutions that are adopted at the meetings of the AU will have a profound impact on Africa's development. It is important for African Civil society organizations to drive the process in a way that will benefit everyone in society and will not reinforce the development divide between rich and poor nations. Provision for civil society engagement through the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), the Pan African Parliament and the Court of Justice among the new organs of African Union offers to bridge the distance between African governments and their peoples.

In these institutional and structural provisions the AU offers a comprehensive framework for intra- and extra-African relationships in terms of security, stability, good governance, development and cooperation. The task before CSOs is how to utilize the opportunities within this initiative to make their contributions to ECOSOCC. CSOs should also build partnerships with governments and all segments of civil society, particularly women, youth and the private sector.

Through ECOSOCC, there is space for regular exchange of information and views between CSOs and the state, such as a series of sector-specific forums. CSOs can now easily channel their grievances and contributions to the African Union through the Pan African Parliament or through the ECOSOCC. Civil Society organizations working on human rights, election monitoring and issues of governance can also take advantage of the Peer Review Mechanism under the AU's economic programme of NEPAD to help safeguard the pole against abuse and misuses of power by the state or its agencies.

## 10 Common challenges and Constraints

The greatest challenge for civil society will be to claim its legitimacy, demonstrate its ability and value addition to the continent by bringing in implementable solutions and alternatives to Africa's challenges of disease, the lethal impact of AIDS on food security and livelihoods, poverty, conflict, authoritarian tendencies, heartbreaking events in Sudan's Darfur region, as well as in the beleaguered regions of Ituri and the Kivus in the Democratic Republic of Congo. There is need for both civil society and African leaders to work hard together and to convince the people of the continent that the lives and safety of their fellow Africans are sacrosanct, and that there can be no substitute for the fruits of peace. The fledging support of the civil society in building a people's Africa was long overdue. Turkur Bamanga described the launch of the interim ECOSOCC as a new dawn and a new deal [7].

- Government and civic organizations' relationships in many African countries have been characterized by conflict and counter-accusations. To turn this around and work together may be easier said than done. Most governments scoff at the idea of civil society groups watching over their undemocratic practices, especially in the area of the rule of law, human rights; civic and voter education.
- The leading role that Civil Society was called upon to play in the promotion of democratic values, good governance, the rule of law and human rights, conditions that are indispensable for the economic and social development of Africa is not an easy one. The African Union itself has not been able to openly shame member states that violate human rights and still exercise authoritarian rule which civil society organizations are quick to point out at all times. If civil society organizations are to take the African Union seriously it has to strongly condemn evil and uphold good within its own ranks, or otherwise it will find itself at loggerheads with the people.
- Civic organizations have to prove that they live by what they say and they should not condemn government for the very things found amiss in their own camp. They will have to prove that they can offer alternatives to Africa's economic quagmire and political despondency if they are to remain relevant as an advisory organ to the African Union.
- CSOs have to effectively champion a proactive popularization of the new Africa Union among African people within the context of potential resistance to change. Members of ECOSOCC have to work hard not to be perceived as an alternative club of elites in its operations and collaboration with the African Union.
- Ordinary citizens hope that the collaboration of government and civic groups will enable them to develop appropriate strategies to deal with Africa's daunting challenges. Poverty, HIV AIDS, malaria, instability, conflict, human security, corruption, bad governance and marginalization of Africa peoples are among the contemporary enemies of the African Union.

A long-term engagement of the AU - people partnership requires long term dialogue, shared vision, willingness to share responsibilities, resources and costs.

The starting point in the partnership process is that partners should know each other very well, when it comes to resources, capacity and values. It is in the detailing of action and immediate goals that one finds the important information on the partnerships. Good partnerships have a reputation of being democratic, listening and taking the views of partners seriously.

## 11 Recommendations

Given the magnitude of the challenges facing Africa, all sectors of society, including governments, Civil Society, and the business sector, must pool their resources. In this regard, what is needed is a database of the expertise available to Africa and the OAU/AU. In addition to this type of audit of available expertise, there is need to review how Member States of the OAU/AU have performed with respect to existing commitments they had undertaken.

Although participation, stakeholder involvement, empowerment and ownership are concepts that have gained popularity in Africa especially when it relates to the relationship between the governed and governors there is a danger that they become catch words. Deliberate efforts have to be made to achieve a common understanding of the vision, philosophy and strategies of Africa and its development priorities. Mutual trust is also critical if the AU -people partnership is genuine. There is need to strengthen information and communication channels between AU headquarters and the CSOs.

The success of the AU and the development of Africa will require great sacrifice and new ways of doing things both at the governmental and civil society levels of our societies. But it can be done; it needs to be done and has to be done. Resource mobilization both within and outside the continent remains a big challenge. There are countless means through which the Union can be funded from African sources. The truth is that the AU cannot just survive on the formal membership dues of the states. There is no comparable multilateral institution whether the UN, EU, ASEAN states, or others who do. They rely heavily on the generous contribution of the richer member states that are willing to put their money where their mouth is. After exhausting our internal and Diaspora sources then we could invite others who are genuinely interested in partnering with Africa to come and help in areas we have identified and on terms dictated by us - not the other way round that we have become too dependent on.

For Civil Society Organizations

- There is need for the African Union ECOSOCC to have structures at sub-regional, national and community levels so that it becomes an entity located and accessible to local rural citizens. A people centered and democratic union is not cheap, a lot of resources will be required to make the African Union significant to the ordinary citizen and especially the poor of the poorest. The need to ensure that the under-represented and vulnerable categories within society such as the disabled, the youth and children are adequately integrated can not be overemphasized.
- Civil society must create a strong culture of information sharing and networking. This requires that civil society leaders improve internal governance and management so as to facilitate free flow of information;
- CSOs are crucial for the protection and promotion of the people's rights and to this end they must continue to lobby and advocate for economic justice and debt cancellation in order to free up resources for Africa's Development.

- ECOSOCC should be a think-tank to generate new ideas. It should have both liaison and monitoring functions. It should give its views on the development of the Union and make an input in the Union's programmes and activities. It should also be a forum where CSOs will receive and disseminate information about the Union.
- Better organization and coordination coupled with information dissemination and sharing among CSOs is of crucial importance. As the Africa Union civil society network matures it will be necessary for it to have its own independent secretariat and offices outside the auspices of the African Union. An autonomous, strong and vibrant civil society will continue to need separate strategic planning and strategizing mechanisms outside the framework of the African Union. Sub-regional CSO networks such as the SADC-NGO forum as well as the African Social Forum will need to be linked up to the ECOSOCC concept if they are to meaningfully engage SADC and the AU. In future, separate and uncoordinated CSO dealings with these governmental bodies may only serve to confuse and dilute CSO interventions in economic, social and political issues.
- There is need to involve the African business community as an important component of CSOs in the work of the African Union, given the crucial role the business community plays in pursuit of economic development on the continent. African financial support should be provided to CSOs, to lessen their dependence on outside financial support.
- The Pan African Parliament (PAP) should clearly define its functions and introduce a system of checks and balances. It should be involved in the preparation of the Union budget.
- The CSOs have a wide spread of talent, skills, and expertise that should be used for the development of the continent within the context of the African Union. Thus, CSOs should assist AU in promoting its priority areas and their expertise should be utilized by the African Union such as trade negotiations at World Trade Organization, election monitoring and calls for debt cancellation.

For the African Union

- The African Union should, with the help of its African entrepreneurs be able to have self-financing mechanism rather than continually rely on international donor sponsorship for its long-term vision and programmes. As long as the African Union continues to rely on donor funds it will not be able to respond swiftly and autonomously to challenges of hunger, famine, conflict and instability such as in the case of Darfur.
- There is need to work on the improvement of the weak relations and the lack of synergy between African Civil Society, the African Union and sub-regional intergovernmental institutions such as the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the East Africa Community (EAC), to ensure the successful implementation of the African agenda. Having said this one must hastily add that the AU should not organize CSOs, but rather should facilitate CSOs to organize themselves. Unity within Member States and within sub-regions is a necessary condition for continental unity.

- The AU will need to devise a mechanism of dealing with operational concerns and threats faced by CSOs in some Member States. In line with this it remains important for the AU to strengthen people's participation and ownership of programs and initiatives and to ensure that the priorities and aspirations of the African people are fully reflected. Initiatives such as the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) leaves a lot to be desired when one considers the conceptualization and progress of the program, as people were not afforded enough space to debate it in its formulation stage. People were basically engaged at a later stage, leaving them without the option of rejecting it but panel beating it.
- There is the urgent need for the African Union to move from rhetoric to action, otherwise it will not be different from its predecessor, the OAU. One of the critical factors of failure that retarded growth and development in the past is the inability of African leaders to implement regional policy initiatives, commitments, protocols and conventions as well as other legally bidding agreements.
- Sovereignty has often been used to protect leaders at the expense of citizens. The Constitutive Act of the African Union allows for intervention without the consent of the target state in a way that the OAU system of complete consensus never did. To be effective the, though, the Au will need to agree on how intervention will be authorized and on mechanisms for its implementation. While the AU may have limited resources, not all action is costly. If African leaders speak out against human rights violations whenever they occur and combine this with a small, well-trained regional force, the benefits will outweigh the costs.

## 12 Conclusion

The Africa Union, unlike its predecessor the OAU, seems determined to graduate from a "politicians club" to a people centered and driven regional organization. The paperwork has been done; what is left is to see whether both CSOs and governments will make it a success by working harmoniously to attain democracy and economic development on the continent. The peoples of Africa, both the pessimists and opportunists, have waited so long to see this become a reality and they cannot wait any longer. The overall goal is to work towards an Africa that is integrated, peaceful and prosperous.

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