ECA AND CSOs

A FRAMEWORK FOR PARTNERSHIP

Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
Development Management Division

ECA AND CSOs:
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Executive Summary

The continuing decline in the economies of many African countries has spurred a significant shift in development orientation and the introduction of wide-ranging reforms for coping with the enormous development challenges of the region. This has led to a reappraisal of the role of the State. Today, the State is viewed less as a direct producer of goods and more as an institution that provides an environment that is conducive to economic growth. This shift in orientation brought with it a renewed recognition of the role of non-state actors, most importantly, the civil society sector.

The search for recognition of the role of civil society in the development process in Africa was ably spearheaded by ECA, leading to its holding an International Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process in Africa in 1990. The result of this conference was the African Charter for Popular Participation. This was in direct response to a call by the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to the Ad-hoc Committee of the Whole of the of the United Nations General Assembly on the mid-term review and assessment of the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD), as a result of the failure of the programme to achieve its objectives.

ECA has been consistent in its dedication to strengthening civil society and its participation in development in Africa. During the past decade, ECA has incrementally built on its work in promoting civil society's participation in development and in strengthening civil society organizations to play a structured role. ECA has taken on the task of, among other things, finding ways to:

- Promote visibility and understanding of civil society's participation in the development and governance process;
- Promote new, creative ways to facilitate interface between CSOs and governments and among CSOs;
- Promote an enabling environment conducive to CSO participation; and
- Find ways to institutionalize the participatory process.

These functions are evident in ECA's activities, which include holding national, subregional and regional consultations with civil society, working with such organizations, and publishing and disseminating research

studies, technical manuals, newsletters and other materials on the role of CSOs in development and governance.

Given this experience, ECA has come to support the importance of a strong and vibrant civil society. Success in participatory development very much depends on a partnership with vibrant civil society organizations, and interaction at all levels and among all development actors. In this regard, the framework for enhancing ECA/CSO relations is part of a broader effort to promote the participation of civil society in the development and governance process in Africa and to build the capacity it requires to be an effective player.

Africa's civil society has proved itself a useful force in many areas. Throughout Africa, community and civic organizations are playing active roles in helping to carry out development activities. The participation of civil society is positive as well as expanding.

Dating back to pre-independence, civil society was a vital part of the liberation struggle and currently, it is ensuring that democracy in Africa truly becomes deep rooted. It has been effective in fostering debate on policies, vigilance on actions, public accountability and insistence on the rule of law, as in South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda, among other countries.

The wide recognition of the critically important work of CSOs has implications for ECA's work and there is a need to face up to the challenge of building the organizational and leadership capacity of civil society organizations and creating an enabling and conducive environment to enhance the contribution of civil society.

Given the scope of the mission and the inherent task of mainstreaming participation in Africa's development, and the fact that ECA and CSOs have a common cause, it is vital to forge partnership. In this respect, ECA has identified the categories of CSOs with whom it wants to forge partnerships.

To ensure impact, ECA has taken a more cautious approach by focusing on a few priorities. ECA and selected CSOs should move more radically to exploit synergy from their new form of collaboration and leveraging it to attain the major strategic goals outlined below:

ECA/CSO partnership for development: important considerations

The success of the partnership is dependent on a number of elements including:

- The four basic principles underpinning the ECA/CSO relations, namely, recognition of the magnitude of the development challenge facing Africa and the unprecedented need for collective and collaborative actions; the need to exploit the strength that each brings to the relationship and build synergy from it; partnership based on mutual responsibility and expectations, and; that CSO's efforts should be complementary to government action and not become a substitute.
- The influencing factors, such as legal and regulatory aspects and the space for participation, relationship with government, and financial sustainability.
- The complexity and variety of the challenges and the need to make sure that the partnership impacts on critical development concerns.

Strategies and priorities for action

The challenge is how to make effective use of ECA/CSO cooperation to enhance CSO participation and contribution to Africa's development. This requires having to focus ECA/CSO cooperation on assisting in the creation of the best environment and modalities to facilitate and enhance CSO participation in the development process. Catalyzing a closer link among CSOs to increase outreach, and sharing responsibility for development between CSOs and governments will constitute the key strategy for evolving a rich and vibrant civil society capable of bringing about qualitative change in the development arena.

Managing ECA/CSO partnership

The success of the partnership has to be supported by organization-wide commitment and adoption of measures to build a more associative and consultative relationship. This will include strengthening existing institutional arrangements at the legislative and operational levels, promoting CSO participation in the work of ECA, improving access to information and strengthening capacity and networking.

In conclusion:

- In order to maximize the potential for CSO contribution to Africa's development, ECA/CSO partnerships have to be customized to use the strength's of each partner.
- For these partnerships to materialize, a number of fundamentals are necessary - shared responsibility, strategic choice of actions/activities, and most importantly, strong commitment.
- The partners have to be sufficiently equipped to work together, and in this respect, capacity building assumes significant importance.
- ECA/CSO interface is an experimental process and a learning experience, with both sides learning as they incrementally go along using each encounter to improve ECA/CSO relations.

Introduction

The context

An important feature in the on-going political and economic renewal process in Africa is redefinition of the role of the State in the national economy. In contrast to the early post-independence period, when government played a dominant role in the economy, beginning with the early 80s, there has been a reappraisal of this role. Presently, the State is viewed less as a direct producer of goods and more as an institution that provides an environment that is conducive to economic growth, in which issues of effective governance, peace and security, democracy, and economic and corporate governance are central. The current credo is rather that all development actors, state and non-state, need to be mobilized in a collaborative effort to tackle pervasive development challenges. In the process of achieving long-term growth and sustained development, African political and development leaders must use the energy, spirit and will of its people. In this regard, African governments must embrace the concept of participatory development as a fundamental framework for cooperation. This re-enforces the need for African governments to adopt participatory and inclusive mechanisms for developing the right policies and programmes. In so doing, African governments can forge ahead in implementing their own development agendas. This fundamental perception, that people's participation must be the cornerstone of Africa's development paradigm, implies a total reorientation of national policies and a reengineering of citizen-state relations.

A number of proponents for accelerating Africa's development generally argue for the adoption of the participatory development approach. The idea of bringing civil society into the centre stage of Africa's development process has been growing. For example, the Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), an initiative of African governments and NGOs, elaborated a process to inspire African peoples and governments to re-engage collaboratively to address the problems of security and stability in Africa as prerequisites for the development of the continent. The initiative is a landmark event, not simply because it mapped out a comprehensive and holistic approach to Africa's economic development, but more significantly, it showed what can be achieved when people and governments come together to find solutions to common problems – a programme that reflects the real needs of society. Moreover, under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), constructive engagement between African

Governments' and their peoples has become the handmaid of Africa's development.

The case for bringing civil society in the center of Africa's development process has been made even stronger by the United Nations Secretary-General in a number of areas. In his report on arrangements and practices for the interaction of NGOs in all activities of the United Nations system, he highlighted measures for enhancing close collaboration and dialogue between the United Nations and civil society and on how to improve civil society's access to information and increased participation. The Secretary-General, in his comprehensive initiative for Africa, the UN System-Wide Special Initiative for Africa, made the strengthening of civil society and the promotion of popular participation core priorities. He also requested United Nations system organizations to build alliances with organizations of civil society, promoting development, democracy and peace building. Last but not least, member countries at the United Nations Millenium Summit declared their commitment to make the organization a people's organization, improve its popular relationships and, finally, resolved to give full opportunities to NGOs and other non-state actors to make their indispensable contribution to the Organization's work.

It is an opportunity for African indigenous people's movements and citizen's organizations, that represent citizens in more legitimate ways, to marshal their force, experience and knowledge to play a constructive role in national development, similar to the role that citizen's organizations have played in the development of sustainable economies in the North. The requisite commitment to participatory development for ending poverty has never been more opportune and feasible. This moment must be seized by:

- Examining the citizen, society-state interface and assisting in proposing strategies for constructive dialogue and engagement;
- Getting States to recognize that development springs from the collective imagination, experiences and decisions of people, and;
- Setting the stage for citizen, society and state interface, building social capital that underpins the development of an effective and assertive civil society and structuring the role of civil society organizations as complementary contributors to Africa's development.

In support of partnership

Partnerships with civil society, government, private sector and other multilateral partners, each playing to their respective strength, form the basis for the perceived ECA/CSO enhanced relationship. Key to the success of these partnerships are ECA's firm commitment to promoting participation as a vehicle for sustained socio-economic development of the Africa region; the need to deepen and consolidate past efforts on building a relationship with civil society; a recognition of the valuable role CSOs have and can continue to play in Africa's development and to deepen it further; and demonstration of the benefits of cooperation.

The genesis of ECA/CSOs relations

ECA's attempt to work with CSOs goes way back to 1990 with the organization of the International Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development process in Africa. The initiative for this Conference came from submission of the NGOs to the Ad-Hoc Committee of the Whole of the UN General Assembly on the mid-term review and assessment of the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Recovery and Development 1986-1990(UN-PAAERD) as a result of the failure of the Programme to accelerate Africa's growth and development. This Conference, which was organized under the theme "Putting the People First", searched for collective understanding of the role of popular participation and a conceptual framework on which to work with people's organizations. This search was based on the premise that communication and cooperation with CSOs was found to be necessary, urgent and possible at all levels of development work. In response to this conviction, the Conference adopted the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation as a framework for consulting and engaging CSOs in the process of recovery and development.

ECA, with the support of its member States, has worked hard to nurture the precepts of the Charter and, with all fairness, has played an important role in furthering the participation of civil society in the development process in Africa. Over the years, ECA has collaborated with numerous African CSO umbrellas and networks in organizing national, subregional, regional and international conferences on the subject of promoting effective popular participation. It has also jointly undertaken research on a number of issues central to the engendering of participation in the development process. Beginning in1992, ECA, through funds from the German Technical Assistance Organization (GTZ), has been assisting

member States and CSOs throughout Africa to network, to improve the conditions under which they operate, to build their capacity and to link States and CSOs together for a common cause. Years of working together has led, for example, to the inclusion for the first time of CSO participation-related activities in ECA's 1998-1999 regular budget programme of work. Moreover, CSOs have been consulted in the formulation and adoption of a new programme orientation for ECA, as articulated in the document "Serving Africa Better: Strategic Directions for the Economic Commission for Africa". Lastly, ECA has been building strategic alliances with CSOs in promoting activities of shared interest such as advocacy for policy, private sector development, advancement of women, protection of the environment, enhancing food security and peace, and conflict resolution, democracy and good governance.

In support of this positive experience, ECA redefined its mission and work; it put in place institutional arrangements for greater interaction with and participation of CSOs in three areas: programme and priority re-establishment to include activities in support of the CSO role in the development process; organizational restructuring resulting in the establishment of the Development Management Division with the responsibility of overseeing the complementary and reinforcing roles of the State, private sector and civil society; reforming the intergovernmental machinery, i.e., the inter-governmental Committee on Human Development and Civil Society with the mission to play a participatory role in helping to strengthen CSO participation and human development.
It was to also enable ECA to draw on opinions in the public, and private sectors and civil society in its operations. Finally, to meet the challenges of working with and through CSOs, it is necessary to establish a set of criteria that would guide the development and enhanced working relationship.

CSO and Africa's development

CSOs and their role in development have evolved in complex ways. Changes in both the African and international political, economic and social landscape have redefined the context in which they work and the scope of their involvement.

For example, CSOs played a significant role in the evolution of modern nation States. They were a major force in the long struggle for independence, which swept across most of Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. Their extensive mobilization strength was a source of pressure for the end of colonial rule. It was the women's movement, labour unions,

professional associations, and other civic associations that pressed for political independence from colonial powers. They also acted as a response to political and economic emergencies brought on by wars and conflicts. CSOs addressed the challenges of the transition from central government control systems to market-based economic systems, democratization and good governance. Moreover, they had to deal with poverty-related issues, for which grassroots capability is considered as the backbone for poverty reduction and a situation favoring the advocacy and mobilizing role of CSOs. On top of these changes in their work, CSOs also benefited from changes in international aid cooperation with an emphasis on the participation of local communities in the planning and implementation of development programmes, took advantage of the opportunities for advocacy offered by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and tackled the effects of economic globalization.

These evolving situations have not only redefined the changing role of CSOs but have created conditions for concrete actions for increasing their participation. These could encompass changes necessary for building strong CSO/government relationship, creating organizational structures in support of participation, instituting arrangements for financing activities and facilitating other linkages within which CSOs can function more effectively.

Against this background, CSOs have been an essential part of responsive democratic governance and sustainable human development. The recently concluded ECA study surveying the status of African civil society and their participation in the development and governance in Africa provides a suitable overview of the role indigenous African CSOs play in Africa's development (see box).

The sphere of CSO work has expanded beyond the traditional social mobilization and empowerment realms, but lately has become avenue and training ground for those who play important community development and leadership roles. Today, African CSOs are demanding space to dialogue at the international scene and are providing voice to the African concerns at the global level. They articulate the interest of Africa in the various summits, conferences and negotiations where major decisions of global dimensions are made.

They are seen as effective deliverers of small-scale development assistance, considered to be more flexible, innovative and cost-effective. They are also more poverty oriented and grassroots focused, more able to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized segments of populations, more effective in the delivery of services such as adult literacy, primary health, environmental protection, small-scale enterprise development, micro-credit. CSOs are more participatory and able to mobilize and organize local self-help groups to maintain services.

For these reasons, they are legitimate partners alongside State and market actors in a range of development and economic activities. With the formidable development challenges facing Africa, it is apparent that on no continent, is the need for a strong civil society greater than in Africa: a continent whose long-term growth and sustained development depends on how well it utilizes its resources – particularly its human capital, of which civil society represents a significant manifestation. Africa is a continent where institutional environment is extremely weak; poverty and underdevelopment is overwhelming; globalization has weakened the capacity of the State, conflict and communal violence are rife and there is lack of understanding of the importance of democracy and good governance to people's lives. It is in the African continent that a vibrant CSO, working hand in hand with the State is vital to sustaining the legitimacy of government authority, reducing various risks associated with a dysfunctional State, and facilitating economic development.

The mission

Making civil society active, viable and strong is the greatest challenge, with the wide acknowledgement of broad-based participatory development in which civil society plays its fair share in the economic transformation and growth. Meeting this challenge takes dedication and steadfastness on the part of all to consolidate civil society's participation. In this respect, we have to uplift, focus and inspire all round commitment to popularizing civil society's participation in development and governance process in Africa.

Categories of CSOs with whom ECA wants to forge partnership

ECA will actively seek and target its relationship with groups of CSOs who by their posture have the potential of making the greatest impact. While full representation of the major constituents of civil society would be the eventual goal, at this stage ECA has to be pragmatic and target CSO. Criteria for selection of who to forge partnership with will be guided by the following, in no order of priority.

- Pan-African, subregional and national apex, umbrella, consortia, platforms or network CSOs, who by their posture are well situated to foster closer cooperation and partnership between civil society organizations and governments, and between CSOs and development partners.

- Indigenous African CSO umbrellas/networks/consortia working in thematic areas of special importance to Africa's development such as sustainable development, globalization, social exclusion (focus on gender, HIV/AIDS, health, education…), micro-and small-enterprise development/micro-financing and democratization and good governance.
- Building relationships with Northern and non-African Southern development NGOs will be the primary modality for building South-South and North-South links, as an important source of support at the global level. This could also be an important communication link at international forums, helping to harmonize African CSOs views with those of the international community.
- International NGO networks focusing initially with those already working in the African scene and have established links with local affiliates.

Strategic goals and benefits
of ECA/CSO cooperation

Fostering more successful ECA/CSO relations requires having to be selective in its areas of intervention and to focus on strategic areas critical to civil society development and contribution to the economic transformation process. Their strategic goals should be:

- Facilitating national dialogue on government/CSO relationship to create an enabling and supportive environment for civil society participation;
- Strengthening the capacity of indigenous CSOs to enhance their contribution to Africa's development and democratization process through a mix of practical ways;
- Providing prominence to the work of civil society by highlighting and documenting what works and strengthening best practices in civil society participation;
- Providing and strengthening institutional frameworks for deepening CSOs participation in development.

Improved partnership, between the ECA and CSOs will advance the nexus between participation, partnership, ownership and development.

ECA, through an enhanced partnership with CSOs can assist in harnessing the force of civil society. In this respect, the objectives of the ECA/CSO relations are to collaboratively seek solutions to Africa's development by studying, promoting, documenting and disseminating best examples of

civil society participation in development. It is expected that through the enhanced ECA/CSO relationship, government, the business sector, other development actors and people in general could be mobilized to address the development challenges facing the Africa region. Improved ECA/CSO partnership is about dynamizing the relationship that empowers the development of a stronger and more involving civil society.

1.   ECA/CSO partnership for Development: Important considerations

1.1. The principles guiding ECA/CSO relations

The proposed framework for enhancing ECA/CSO relations is anchored on the four basic principles outlined as follows:

- Achieving development targets is enhanced if all partners act simultaneously and cooperatively to scale up development results. Building incrementally on each other's activities is needed for accelerating Africa's development;
- There is need for each partner to bring its strengths to the relationship, to exploit creatively the potential contribution of each other. This underlines the equality in the relationship;
- Partnership should be based on mutual responsibility for addressing Africa's development challenges through an envisaged mechanism for consultation and collaborative engagement, agreed-upon development priorities, willingness to share expertise and experience and join mobilization of resources to solve development problems through partnership.
- CSO activities should complement the efforts of government and not substitute or compete with them.

1.2. Factors influencing the partnership

The existence of an enabling environment is crucial and should be given significant attention and treated as an integral part of the relationship-building process. In this respect, ECA and partner CSOs will build strategies to address critical conditions and factors including legal and regulatory aspects of the working environment, the relationship with government to ensure promotion of cooperation rather than competition, resource mobilization to ensure financing of activities undertaken either jointly or independently, and how these factors facilitate or constrain ECA/CSO relations.

1.3 The complexity and variety of the development challenges

Partnership between ECA and CSOs could be useful in sharing insights that bolster programme content and impact on critical development concerns, including issues of:

- Special significance to vulnerable groups including the poorest groups.
- Basic survival, which has continent-wide development implications including the HIV/AIDS pandemic, basic health services, education, poverty reduction, agricultural development, environmental management, etc.
- Economic globalization and its impact on Africa's economies; the central role of CSOs in the international economic policy-making process including facilitating North-South dialogue to safeguard Africa's interest; policy advocacy, addressing the effects on Africa's economies, its unfairness and debt-related concerns.
- Capacity building and the magnitude of efforts required in meeting the capacity-building needs of CSOs.

2.   Strategies and priorities for action

ECA foresees using a number of avenues to nurture and strengthen this partnership with CSOs. ECA's efforts will focus on assisting in the creation of the best environment and modalities to facilitate and enhance CSO participation in the development process. The key strategy is to evolve a rich and vibrant civil society as a force for bringing about the necessary structural and qualitative changes in the development arena, that engages government as legitimate stakeholders in development, ready and capable to take part in the development of their continent. Strategic areas for ECA/CSO collaboration include:

2.1. Engendering/mainstreaming participation

Engendering/mainstreaming participation in the development process is seen as part of the redefinition of the role of the State in the national economy. It also assumes that participation as a development paradigm is widely understood and accepted. The need for collaboration in promoting the participation of civil society in the development process assumes a higher level of importance. Bringing change to this situation requires major adjustments to existing modalities that are critical for opening spaces and processes for greater interaction, establishing institutional mechanisms for building linkages, and establishing appropriate points of entry in the development process. Inevitably, these are areas in which a difficult balance must be struck between helping governments open up space and supporting CSOs to take on their developmental role. The key in this respect is trust building and to this end, ECA working with CSOs can bring about qualitative reforms that promote the co-existence of the State and civil society, each playing the role they do best.

2.2. Defining strategies for expanding CSO/government partnership

Some governments which do not fully understand the positive role and usefulness of civil society in the development arena have, on some occasions sought to frustrate CSO efforts by imposing restrictive conditions. The reverse side is that many CSOs are mistrustful of their governments and, as a result, this has affected the working relationship. Providing a platform and opportunities for civil society/government

interface and policy dialogue will constitute the main strategy for expanding government/CSO partnerships. By working together, ECA and CSOs can progress towards diffusing the culture of mutual distrust, review the state of CSO/government relations and bring together CSOs and government to discuss matters of mutual concern and find ways to improve their working relations, improve policy dialogue and foster an enabling environment for CSO involvement. To this end, ECA will use its strategic position and work with CSOs and member governments to develop strategies for working more effectively and encouraging more popular participation in development.

With respect to policy dialogue, the scope will range from the national through to the global level. The focus will be on policy implications of programmes at different levels (national, subregional, regional and global). These will constitute the main areas in which ECA and CSOs will team up to:

- Initiate or support appropriate forums for consultations on issues, sectoral and national action plans as well as development programmes and activities;
- Articulate and consolidate the wide and often conflicting views and interests; and
- Advance CSO positions.

To deal with the complexities of CSO interface and interaction with other development partners, in particular government, the thrust of ECA/CSO collaborative actions will support national efforts to improve legislative and regulatory environment; assist in the establishment and improvement of structures for building relations between government and civil society; and encourage CSO thematic networks to actively participate in the technical work of subregional, regional and international bodies when they are working on key issues of relevance to the continent's development and vice versa.

In addition to providing opportunities for dialogue and interaction, Government/CSO partnership will include documenting and disseminating best practices in government/CSO collaboration, highlighting best interaction instruments and processes for spreading development impacts, and undertaking baseline studies to establish indicators for assessing and evaluating the participation of CSOs in development, with the view to providing tangible justification for greater CSO participation.

Through this process, the ECA will play a catalytic role by working with civil society institutions to deal more effectively with the State sector. It will also educate bureaucracies and political leaders on the need to understand and support CSO participation, including assisting in reviewing

existing polices and regulations to make them friendlier to CSOs participation. The benefits of State/CSO interaction and dialogue will be the stronger and more durable mechanisms created to strengthen CSOs, facilitation of their links and interaction with government and improved working relations.

2.3. Empowering civil society from the grassroots up

This will aim at developing the CSO outlook, creating sufficient capacity and building appropriate links for them to become credible development partners with government, market and other development actors. It will involve access to information, knowledge and resources; decision-making power; conscientization to raise awareness on the relevance of their participation in the development process; and mobilization to increase communities' participation in development. Concretely, these multiple but inter-related dimensions of empowerment would manifest themselves in civic education programmes; coalition building among and between CSOs; capacity building with emphasis on training for human and organizational development; expanding Information Technology and information-management capabilities to support and foster government/CSO collaboration in development and governance; building the financial resource base to support CSOs work on the ground and ensure financial self-sufficiency[2]; and developing strategic partnerships by facilitating networking arrangements including North-South and South-South contacts to provide a voice for African CSOs at the international level. The challenge here is to develop contacts beyond the normal aid relationship.

2.4. Enhancing civil society involvement in UN programmes and other internationally driven programmes.

In the context of the Secretary-General's commitment to bolstering civil society participation and expanding the UN's relationship with civil society, ways will be found to intimately involve CSOs in the development of global programmes and as instruments for implementation and for change. To meet the challenges of working with CSOs, it is necessary to

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[2] In this respect, concerted efforts by both ECA and CSOs will be made to actively pursue funding strategies from diverse sources, including the United Nations family of organizations, multilateral agencies and government sources, to finance the work of civil society.

work with CSOs to jointly establish a set of criteria that would guide the development of an enhanced working relationship. Of relevance to this expectation, ECA will consider the following:

- CSOs, ECA and other UN bodies should cooperate with a view to facilitating linkages between UN agencies and indigenous African CSOs;
- ECA and CSOs should make all efforts to facilitate the ratification and translation of the many UN resolutions/ agreements/charters into actions;
- ECA and CSOs would educate the larger civil society on how the UN works and how best to make use of its services, including how to gain Consultative Status with the ECOSOC and other inter-governmental structures of the UN; and
- Exploring opportunities for wider collaboration with CSOs including creating channels for participation in the work of the United Nations System particularly in the implementation of UN-sponsored programmes.

3.   Managing ECA/CSO Partnership

While the ECA recognizes that it needs a varying range of relationship-building approaches, it has to, for now, focus its attention on seeking effective and efficient ways and means of contributing to:

- Deepening ECA's vision of engendering/mainstreaming participation in the development process,
- Providing a representative voice of CSOs in shaping the work of the Commission and in the development of Africa,
- Increasing channels of interaction including attendance at meetings and other ECA sponsored gatherings, and
- Establishing collaborative mechanisms to provide operational meaning to the partnership.

What follows are examples on ways to adapt and improve the relationship between the ECA and CSOs.

3.1. Strengthening existing institutional arrangements

The first step in building a ECA/CSO relationship is through the Committee on Human Development and Civil Society (CHDCS), a forum created to facilitate in-depth consultation on how to build mechanisms and broaden the space for people's participation in the African development process(see annex[3]. The Committee, established by the Conference of African Ministers responsible for Economic and Social Development and Planning at its twenty-third session held in Addis Ababa 5-8 May 1997, is a legislative organ providing a forum to enhance policy dialogue among representatives of the three sectors – public, private and civil society. The Committee will also enable the ECA and African governments to draw on the opinions of experts on issues of sustainable development and popular participation.

Another institutional modality for partnership is the African Centre for Civil Society (ACCS), established in collaboration with African CSOs and housed within the Development Management Division. It was established primarily to give institutional permanency to ECA's work in the areas of

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[3] Constitution and Functions of CHDCS

promoting popular participation and strengthening civil society organizations.

- The ACCS was established to provide an institutional framework for interface between ECA and the African civil society. It is also ECA's vehicle for strengthening the participation of civil society organizations in development and governance. In addition, it providesd the platform for the constructive engagement of of African civil society organisations in development policies and programmes as well as serve as a knowledge centre for the documentation and dissemination of information on civil society. One of the challenges that remains is how to fully operationalize the Centre, making viable and effective.

3.2. Promoting CSO participation in the work of ECA

While CSO participation in ECA's work, is commendable, it could be enhanced for more operational partnership at various levels - in constructing policies, in implementing ECA decisions and programmes as well as outcomes of UN and international conferences. As ECA seeks to broaden the participation of CSOs beyond the existing practice of consultation, it will need to adopt approaches that will allow programmatic flexibility and help bring more transparency in all aspects of the ECA-CSO relationship. As a starting point, ECA will be reviewing its policies for ensuring constructive engagement of civil society. Next will be an evaluation of current working procedures with the view to seeing how the planning and implementation processes as well as the "partnership culture" within ECA will encourage greater CSO participation in the work of ECA. This will be re-enforced through the development of guidelines and providing ECA staff with training on cooperation with CSOs. Analyses of best practices for CSO participation will be undertaken from which to make creative suggestions as to how these can become standards for CSO participation in the work of the ECA.

3.3. Improving access to information

Innovate ways will be explored to enhance ability to communicate with civil society at large and to improve access to ECA and CSO information. Greater use will be made off Web sites for the dissemination of information. Computerized databases do play an important role in ensuring participation by CSOs and in developing an interface among CSOs and

between ECA and CSOs. ECA will support the development and continuous updating of user-friendly information systems and databases for making information more accessible to the networks of CSOs.

3.4. Strengthening capacity and networking

The strengthening of capacity should take place at the ECA and the CSO levels. At the ECA level, capacity building is necessary to make the secretariat more effective and efficient in carrying out its role as champion/flag bearer of civil society. Capacity building is also required to enable the Commission to respond adequately to opportunities for greater ECA-CSO collaboration. In this regard, ECA will:

- Formulate clear policy and operational guidelines on cooperation with civil society;
- Promote in-house partnerships on activities involving CSOs;
- Harness existing resources and directing them to initiatives involving CSO participation;
- Mobilize resources for funding specific activities;
- Promote co-ordination, exchange and networking of information among various ECA departments and programmes;
- Improve co-ordination mechanism for tracing and brining synergy to, one ECA's work on CSOs' participation, two, ECA's collaboration with CSOs;
- Develop and promote information documentation, exchange and dialogue between ECA and CSOs;
- Establish at the secretariat, an integrated database on CSOs to which all substantive divisions will contribute to its maintenance and updating;
- Provide training and other developmental programmes to strengthen collaboration with civil society;
- Promote knowledge and learning from actions on the ground by documenting and disseminating experiences and best practices; and
- Increase networking with other organizations for improving response to opportunities for greater collaboration.

With respect to the strengthening of CSOs capacity, there is need to adopt practical ways in which to provide capacity building assistance for addressing the capacity needs outlined inter-alia. These will include:

- Developing and promoting a participatory process;
- Facilitating programmatic and operational collaboration with and among CSOs;

- Providing technical expertise;
- Facilitating networking arrangements including North-South and South-South contacts;
- Promoting African and non-African CSO partnerships in Africa's development;
- Promoting State-civil society interface in the delivery of services in African countries;
- Building a financial resource base as a way of encouraging financial self- reliance; and
- Institutionalizing a forum for periodic dialogue and information exchange including encouraging the launching of a region-wide CSO newsletter to discuss and disseminate positions and the outcomes of actions undertaken by the CSO community.

Annex

Constitution and Functions of the CHDCS

I. BACKGROUND

The United Nations General Assembly during its Twelfth Ordinary Session adopted Resolution 1155 (XIII) of 26 November 1957, recommending that the Economic and Social Council, at its next session, give prompt and favorable consideration to the establishment of an Economic Commission for Africa.

The Economic and Social Council, having considered General Assembly resolution 1155 (XII) of November 1957, recommending the need to give effective aid to the countries and territories of Africa in accordance with Article 68 of the Charter of the United Nations, established the Economic Commission for Africa by its resolution 671 (XXV) adopted on 29 April 1958.

Among the major terms of reference of the Commission are:

(a)   The Commission may establish such liaison as it Deems appropriate with inter-governmental organizations in Africa operating in the same field;

(b)   The Commission shall adopt is own rules of procedure, including the method of selecting its chairman and other officers;

(c)   The administrative budget of the Commission shall be financed from the funds of the United Nations;

(d)   The Secretary General of the United Nations shall appoint the Executive Secretary of the Commission;

(e)   The Commission shall submit to the Economic and Social Council once a year a full report on its activities and plans, including those of any subsidiary bodies;

(f)   The headquarters of the Commission and its Secretariat shall be located in Africa. The Commission may in due

course also establish such subregional offices as it may find necessary;

(g) The first session of the Commission shall be called by the Secretary General as soon as practicable, but not later than the end of 1958; and,

(h) The Economic and Social Council shall, from time to time make special reviews of the work of the Commission.

It is against this background that the Commission's legislative mandate is derived. The Commission[4] is the principal policy organ of the secretariat.

The Conference of African Ministers responsible for Economic and social development and planning is keeping with its mandate adopted Resolution no. 826 (XXXII) in April 1997, through which the ministers structured ECA's policy organs and introduced new subsidiary bodies to deal with emerging development issues facing the continent. Among these organs and subsidiary bodies,(Pare "B-4") the Ministers established the "Committee on Human Development and Civil Society" as follows:

"The Committee's mission will be to help strengthen the civil society and human development. It will enable ECA to draw on opinions of experts in the public and private sectors and civil society, in its operations. The Committee will conduct development and follow-up activities pertaining to global and regional action programmes such as the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development and the African Charter for Popular participation in Development and Transformation. It will review major trends and issues of regional interest regarding human development and the civil society".

It would serve as a forum for reviewing specific issues related to human and social development as well as popular participation and the role of civil society. In these respects, the committee is to strengthen coherence of the ECA work programme in the areas of human and social development and popular participation as well as deepen policy dialogue with member States. This committee will meet once every two years. The Terms of Reference of this Committee are as follows.

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[4] The Conference of African Ministers responsible for economic and social development and planning constitutes the "Commission" when it is meeting

(a) Assist member States to promote measures to follow-up the implementation of the regional and globally agreed programmes of action in social and human development and popular participation;

(b) Provide advice to the Commission in formulating its work programmes in the area of human development and popular participation;

(c) Encourage the integration of social and human dimensions into development policies, plans and programmes at both macroeconomic and sectoral levels; and,

(d) Identify and highlight the major economic and social development issues and concerns with a view to promoting policies and strategies for human development and popular participation in development.