

Third Meeting of the ECA Committee on Human Development and Civil Society

Opening Statement

By Mr. K.Y. Amoako
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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
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Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellency, Hassan Abdella, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,
Your Excellency Sidi Mohamed Ould Taleb, Minister of Rural Development, Water and Environment of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania,
Distinguished Representatives of Governments, the Private Sector and Civil Society,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen, On behalf of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), let me warmly welcome you all to Addis Ababa for this Meeting of the Committee on Human Development and Civil Society. It is the third meeting of this Committee since it was established in 1997.

Its main aim is to promote dialogue on key issues affecting Africa's pressing human development and governance challenges.

Special attention will be paid to strengthening government responses to issues such as participatory national budgeting and public-private partnerships for service delivery. It will also recommend strategies for promoting effective stakeholder participation in the African Peer Review Mechanism.

We, at ECA, find this consultation most timely, and I am delighted to welcome the Addis Ababa diplomatic corps as well as special guests from some 30 countries.

Mr. Chairman,

Africa has recently benefited from renewed attention to its multiple challenges. From African governments themselves, through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and from international partners who have realized Africa's genuine commitment to good political and economic governance in striving to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

As our own research here at ECA has demonstrated, the continent has taken significant steps over the last 10 years in implementing sustainable democratic institutions and practices.

In the last six years, we have been researching the state of governance in Africa and this has generated a wealth of information in this field. The findings, based on comprehensive surveys in 28 countries, will soon be released in the inaugural issue of the African Governance Report.

Yet, these institutions and practices will remain fragile, and our development goals a pipedream, if African governments fail to mobilize enough resources to alleviate poverty.

Mr. Chairman,

In recent years, we have all come to realize that progressive, sustainable development can only come about with the involvement of all our citizens, particularly the private sector.

Such participation drives progress on issues that matter the most to people. When citizens can legitimately influence and share control over the issues affecting them, they can shape their own futures.

We firmly believe that this is the best way to deepen and uphold democracies, build effective institutions, and achieve sustained human development. But we are still learning how to promote such participation. All too often, it is intermittent, ad-hoc and shallow. Issues relating to the organization, structures and processes suitable for participation and partnerships still need to be addressed more thoroughly.

The theme of today's meeting, "Participation and Partnerships for Improving Development and Governance in Africa" aims to concentrate on some of these challenges.

The responsibility for expanding the political and civic space lies both with the State, which must promote and protect citizens' freedoms, and with the stakeholders who must seize and create opportunities to manage this space.

What is needed is a holistic, comprehensive, multi-sectoral, and multi-player framework with a role for everyone, as opposed to discrete and fragmented programmes. New partnerships should also reflect a consensus among major partners to support home-grown and home-owned programmes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

People have a right to take part in development and governance processes leading to democratic change. In this respect, the national budget is perhaps the single most important policy document of governments and citizens alike. This is where complex development challenges are expressed in real budgetary terms and reveal a country's fundamental values and vision.

Regarding public service delivery, more attention should be paid to creating strategic partnerships between the public and the private sector, especially in water and sanitation.

Better performance in the supply, quality and effectiveness will almost certainly have a major impact on poverty alleviation efforts, especially in rural areas.

And at the continental level, the APRM offers new unprecedented opportunities for participation if governments genuinely include civil society and other stakeholders in the process.

The message is clear: the concerns facing Africa today are beyond the capacity of governments alone. Solutions will require the talents and resources of all stakeholders.

Mr. Chairman,

Having highlighted the challenges facing Africa on boosting participation and partnerships, let me now turn to the statutory and organizational items on the agenda.

Apart from the regular review of the work programme of the Development Policy and Management Division (DPMD), there are a few considerations I want to underscore related to this Committee's mandate.

First off, the Committee needs to take a fresh look at its mandate since ECA's programme focus has shifted quite significantly from development management to governance. Furthermore, since the Committee brings together public, private, and civil society officials, its broad focus has made it difficult to identify the most appropriate host ministry in each country.

As a result, the institutional mechanisms for implementing Committee decisions at the national level are very weak or nonexistent.

Low attendance at meetings has, in the past, undermined the importance and relevance of the Committee. Therefore, this state of affairs requires a re-examination of the Committee's operations and a proposal to make it more relevant to present needs and realities.

We must then agree on the most appropriate national government structure to serve as the host for the Committee's activities.

Your input therefore is critical. I think you will all agree that it is incumbent upon us to make this Committee as

effective as possible at this exciting juncture for the continent.

I thank you all for taking the time to gather toward our common goals. I wish you a very successful meeting and very fruitful deliberations.
