About the Civil Society Forum

Advocates. Enablers for change. Policy influencers. Project incubators. Experts. Implementing partners. The list to describe the roles that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have been playing in Africa’s social and economic transformation over the past decades is long. In response to this increased Civil Society Engagement (CSE), the African Development Bank has been organizing each year since 2009, the Civil Society Forum (CSO Forum), which is a platform for dialogue between the African Development Bank (AfDB) and Civil Society Organizations, to address Africa’s pressing issues.

This year’s Forum, thus marking the tenth anniversary of the event, took place in AfDB’s headquarters from May 7 to 9, in Abidjan. It gathered CSO representatives, AfDB staff and Management, the private sector, social entrepreneurs and digital bloggers to discuss Civil Society’s role in “Regional Integration for Africa’s Economic Prosperity”, aligning with the 2019 Annual Meetings’ theme. Panels, CSO led-sessions, networking lunches enabled participants to discuss the contribution of Civil Society in implementing this High 5 priority and also, among other things, to explore devising strategies to support AfDB’s replenishment efforts.

Find out more about the Forum in this edition and hear the voices of the diverse, active and influential organizations that took part in it and greatly contributed to this milestone. Happy 10th Anniversary CSO Forum!


Insights from participants

Mamadou Goïta, Executive Director of the Institute for Research and Promotion of Alternatives in Development (IRPAD), is one of the Civil Society Forum’s initiator. Mr Goïta has been involved in the format process and has been taking part in every CSO Forum since the first edition.

“I am very happy today to see the deep content of the themes but also the quality of the participation of Civil Society itself. In ten years, we have helped change the format to have an autonomous space of debate: first it was a participation of Civil Society, but without a dedicated space; then an event on the sidelines of the Annual Meetings, and finally a completely separated event. We see that there is an important evolution, the content and the quality of the participation have improved. I believe this format is the best because it enables us to formulate key messages that are conveyed to the Annual Meetings. It also enables us to take decisions and take action for Africa’s development”.

Jacqueline Kimeu, International Coordinator-ACCESS Coalition

*Regional integration is impossible without partnerships. The AfDB Forum in Abidjan provided an excellent opportunity for Civil Society Organizations and the broader development community across different regions and sectors to come together. It also provided a unique platform for Civil Society to align its various efforts for a more unified voice in engaging AfDB. Civil society actors in the energy sector had the opportunity to network and create synergies towards accelerating achievement of SDG 7. Going forward, the various actors committed to strengthening engagements with AfDB and ensuring more inclusivity of Civil Society voices in the formulation of Country Strategy Papers in the region”.*
Mohamed Abdallah Béelil, Chairman of the Group of Involvement and Participation (GIP) of the Mauritanian Civil Society in the process of the EITI

“The union between AfDB and Civil Society is a union that is being built and is on the right track. AfDB has set up a system, that is to say a division, a committee, exclusively dedicated to Civil Society. This collaboration allows Civil Society to become more familiar with AfDB’s modalities, tools and mechanisms, but it also allows it to actively participate in one of its main objectives, namely African integration. In addition, AfDB is improving its way of dealing with communities by listening to Civil Society, which is the voice of communities. One of AfDB’s flagship objectives is to improve the living conditions of African populations and the best way to meet the needs of these populations is to work with Civil Society Organizations.”

Amélie Gue, Journalist at Le Reporter, Burkina Faso

“These kinds of events are important. They “humanize” the Bank who has the opportunity to have direct and fruitful exchanges with those who are the intermediary between the decision makers and the main beneficiaries, who are the populations. It was a great experience and a networking opportunity. I appreciated that a space was given to new technologies and those who use digital technology to create impact and bring change. We hope that some proposals become concrete. We hope that in the coming months, some recommendations are taken into account or that the ideas emerging from the different exchanges are put into practice”.


The Civil Society Forum had its high moment on Wednesday May 8 2019. A campaign of social mobilization and advocacy for the African Development Fund was launched at an emotion-packed ceremony repleted with powerful declarations and steeped in ringing symbolism. Five committed community leaders and dignitaries officially pledged to support the campaign. Drawing from their experience and relying on their renown to make concrete commitments for Africa’s development and structural transformation, they recalled the concrete, tangible and transformational impacts of the previous African Development Funds and called on technical and financial partners to contribute to the massive and inclusive replenishment of ADF-15. Below are some highlights.

Salif Traoré, aka A’salfo, Magic System Foundation: “My duty and social responsibility are to serve as a role model and point of reference on the continent. That is why I am ready and pledge to travel wherever necessary to Member States, the African and international Civil Society and donors with this message: Africa needs ADF. This is not charity; it is the duty of solidarity.” Shedding a tear or two when recalling his own life, A’salfo not only caused a stir and strong feeling in the hall but also bolstered the commitment of the Civil Society Organizations that were present.

Following suite, other influential persons like Patricia Yao, Founder of Quick Cash & Agribusiness-Canaan Land spoke. For her, “Supporting the African Development Fund is giving the opportunity to thousands of women to empower and support themselves”.

Fatma Ben Rejeb, Executive Director of the Pan-African Farmers’ Organisation and member of the AfDB-Civil Society Committee spoke along the same lines: “The ADF-15 will enable achieving the High 5s: A high-performance agriculture that feeds the continent, industries that transform our raw materials, electricity which is cardinal and feeds the continent, raw materials, electricity which is cardinal and regional integration which is essential for the economic prosperity of the Continent”.

Member of the international NGO, ONE Campaign, with many successful advocacy efforts in health and poverty reduction in Africa under her belt, Oulie Koita, Director for Francophone West Africa, said the following: “ADF-15 is crucial to our agenda. You have seen the Fund’s impact on the lives of Africans. Thirty-eight African countries benefit from the current ADF. Let’s all rally together for poverty reduction and economic prosperity. If you have a voice, please ensure that this replenishment takes place”.

The ceremony’s crowning moment certainly was the powerful message of the 2018 Alternative Nobel Prize Winner, Yacouba Savadogo, “The Man Who Stopped the Desert”. “With my bare hands, a hoe and some manure, I planted 40 hectares of trees, which have now become a forest and form a green belt against desert encroachment. Imagine what we could do if we had more funds for the development of Africa. The world’s balance depends on it. We do not inherit land from our fathers, we borrow it from future generations. To replenish ADF is to guarantee the sustainable development of Africa”.

The Moderator, Yves Zogbo Junior concluded: “Who better than communities, the people and citizens to express the resource needs for achieving the goal of ADF replenishment?”. Thereafter, he invited Zéneb Touré, Head of the Civil Society and Community Engagement Division, to officially launch the ADF social mobilization and advocacy campaign.

The call for commitment from these leaders has already been heeded. During the closing ceremony on Thursday May 9, Forum participants adopted an official declaration supporting the replenishment of the African Development Fund, with the slogan, “For the People, by the People!”

To watch and hear the complete speeches of the 5 ADF voices, visit the following link: www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/topics/civil-society/civil-society-forum-2019

The official declaration supporting the ADF replenishment can be found in the CSO Forum General Report.
The AfDB-CSO Committee: One step further

On May 6, 2019, the Second AfDB-CSO Statutory Meeting took place in Abidjan. During this meeting, Committee members followed up the implementation of previous decisions and proposals and committed to operationalize their action plan. To find out more about these actions and the recommendations that emerged from this meeting, read the Meeting’s Report: www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/2019/07/31/second_statutory_meeting_-afdb-cso_committee_-report.pdf

A few quotes on this AfDB-Civil Society partnership:

Jennifer Blanke, Chair of the AfDB-CSO Committee and Vice-President, Agriculture, Human and Social Development, AfDB

“We all get up in the morning for the same reason: Africa’s development. This is why we all need to be working together. With this AfDB-Civil Society collaboration, CSOs have found out that there is an outlet for their concerns but also a way of solving some of the challenges together”.

Augustine Njamnshi, Vice-Chair of the AfDB-CSO Committee

“The African Development Bank and ourselves are learning. Consultations and inclusiveness with Civil Society are not just for compliances. No, far from it. AfDB realized that when working with Civil Society, things are better. We have taken this hand of fellowship that AfDB stretched to us, and want to make use of it”.

Civil Society Engagement: What is happening in our regions?

Opening Doors to Civil Society Organizations in Regional Member Countries

Open Days with CSOs are designed to create awareness on AfDB’s operations and interventions in the country, receive feedback on the projects funded by AfDB, and discuss modalities of enhancing engagement between AfDB and CSOs as key stakeholders in the achievement of the country’s development priorities. Government representatives also take part in these events.

Burkina Faso CSO Open Day

AfDB and Burkinabe CSOs laid the foundations for a new partnership on the occasion of the Open Day held on March 27, 2019 at AfDB’s Burkina Faso country office in Ouagadougou, on the theme: “AfDB’s contribution to Burkina Faso’s development: Which strategic partnership in the design, implementation and monitoring of operations and projects?” The event was preceded by meetings between the Civil Society and Community Engagement Division and different Ministry representatives that resulted in fruitful exchanges on how to reinforce the partnership between AfDB and the Burkinabe Civil Society.

Kingdom of Eswatini CSO Open Day

The Kingdom of Eswatini’s very first Open Day was organized on May 21, 2019, in collaboration with the National Coordinating Assembly of NGOs (CANGO). The specific objectives of it were to disseminate information on AfDB’s Country Strategy and status of the investment portfolio in Eswatini and share updates on CSO footprint in Eswatini.


In collaboration with the Lesotho Council of NGOs (LCN), the Southern Africa Regional Development and Business Delivery Office (RDGS) coordinated and hosted a CSO consultation workshop on the ongoing CSP for the Kingdom of Lesotho, on April 4, 2019. About 60 participants drawn from various CSOs operating in the country and actively involved in development areas attended the event. The same event took place in Namibia, on May 29, 2019. Both events enabled participants to discuss on what their new CSPs should focus on addressing. While in Lesotho climate change and weak CSO capacity were mentioned, in Namibia youth unemployment and weak private sector capacity were part of the discussions.

In Zambia, CSOs were invited to take part in a Consultative session during the CSP Mid Term Review meeting. AfDB committed to engage with the existing CSO technical expertise to address existing issues in the country such as poverty, youth unemployment, debt sustainability or lack of formal NGO Regulatory framework/policy and improve the quality of projects being implemented.
Working with Civil Society Partners

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)-AfDB Workshop: Climate Change and Resilience in the Sahel
The second in a series of roundtables on Climate Change convened by ICRC, the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, and the Overseas Development Institute was organised in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire in collaboration with AfDB on April 4 2019, focusing specifically on West Africa and the Sahel. It gave centre stage to the voice and experience of people directly affected by conflict and climate, in order to shape global policy. Discussions during the workshop centred on three thematic areas namely; Climate; Internal displacement and the Humanitarian Development Nexus. AfDB’s interests in climate change centers on the need for African States to adopt transformational changes towards low-emission, climate resilient, inclusive, and sustainable development.

Learning from the West African Civil Society Institute (WACSI)

The AfDB Civil Society and Community Engagement Division is in the process of developing guidelines and formulating strategies that will facilitate the mainstreaming of Civil Society Engagement into Bank policies and operations. To ensure that the experience, expertise and know-how of Civil Society practitioners are tapped into the process, the Division decided to learn from the West African Civil Society Institute (WACSI). The mission, which took place in Accra, Ghana, from June 10-14, 2019, provided an opportunity to learn from and exchange with a recognised and renowned institution that has over the years contributed to the growth, expansion and knowledge base of Civil Society Engagement in Africa.

A Word from our Team:

Vanessa Moungar, Director, Gender, Women and Civil Society Department
“Engaging with Civil Society means accelerating efforts to voice the priorities of citizens in the African Development Bank’s work. It also means increasing accountability and transparency with regard to Civil Society Organizations. Our goal is to increase engagement from both Civil Society Organizations and from the AfDB’s sides, so both can understand, integrate and leverage the value of working together for more impact. Because at the end of the day, it’s not us and Civil Society, it’s all of us together in the same tent.”

Zénéb Touré, Manager, Civil Society and Community Engagement Division
“Our work is constantly about finding ways to better engage with Civil Society and this second quarter has proved it. Organizing the Civil Society Forum, but also engaging Civil Society in the key momentum that is the African Development Fund replenishment. This second quarter has also seen the strengthening of our engagement in Regional Member Countries, notably through the organization of CSO Open Days. Here’s to Civil Society in Africa, and here’s to further actions towards Africa’s transformation!”

Luther Tarwin Yaméogo, Principal Civil Society Engagement Advocacy Officer and Task Manager of the Forum
“With this Forum, we have seen the major role CSOs play in achieving AfDB’s High 5s, particularly focusing this year on regional integration. Moreover, the commitment made by Civil Society during the Forum to support AfDB’s replenishment process stresses the willingness of CSOs to go as far as possible in supporting the African Development Bank for a positive impact on populations. For the people, by the people, and always moving forward”.

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