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AU-UN TECHNICAL WORKSHOP ON CSO ACCREDITATION
December 5-6, 2016
New York, USA

REPORT

Introduction

Executive Council Decision EX.CL/Dec.890 (XXVII); from the AU Summit of June 2015 in Johannesburg, South Africa; directed the Economic Social and Cultural Council of the African Union (AU ECOSOCC), as an advisory organ of the Union, and in close consultation with the Commission, AU Organs and Member States, to actively pursue a harmonized mechanism and clear criteria for the granting of AU consultative and observer status to civil society organizations (CSOs) in Africa.

In pursuance of this Decision, a team from the AU Commission and Economic Social and Cultural Council (AU ECOSOCC), in conjunction with the Secretariat of UN Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC), held a technical workshop on the establishment of a civil society organization (CSO) accreditation mechanism for the African Union.

The workshop took place on December 5-6, 2016 at the UN ECOSOC Secretariat in New York.

Purpose and Objectives

The objectives of the Workshop included the following:

1. To acquire a technical understanding of the institutional accreditation procedures in use at the United Nations.
2. To comprehensively review and study the UN accreditation systems and procedures as input to proposed AU mechanism.
3. To obtain the technical recommendations of UN ECOSOC for the design and development of protocols and mechanisms for accrediting CSOs that interface with the African Union.
4. To establish a platform for ongoing technical collaboration between AU ECOSOCC and UN ECOSOC on matters of civil society participation.

Participation

The technical team from the UN ECOSOC Secretariat was led by Mr. Marc-Andre Dorel, Acting Director of the NGO Division; as well as professional staff of the Secretariat including Mr. Neils Pierre, Mr. Diego Rumiany, and Mr. Brody Sigurdason.

The technical team from the AU was led by the Presiding Officer of ECOSOCC, Mr. Joseph Chilengi, and included Ambassador Lazarous Kapambwe, Economic Advisor to the Chairperson of the AUC; Ambassador Jalel Chelba, Head of the Civil Society Division at the ECOSOCC Secretariat in CIDO and Mr. Kyeretwie Osei, Policy Officer at the ECOSOCC Secretariat in CIDO.

WORK SESSIONS AND OUTCOMES

The technical consultations covered the following areas relative to the development of an institutional accreditation mechanism for civil society participation, using the UN ECOSOCC as the principal template of study:

Structural Requirements:

The workshop discussed the structural and administrative requirements that are a prerequisite for large intergovernmental organizations to effectively manage and vet civil society organizations seeking affiliation with said intergovernmental organizations.

Unlike its AU counterpart which is composed of civil society organizations, the UN ECOSOC is an inter-governmental body driven by member states. However, it is open to civil society organizations through the mechanism of a consultative status. The administrative structure set up within the UN ECOSOC to interface with CSOs and manage their applications for a consultative status is the Committee on NGOs; which is a sub-committee of UN ECOSOC.

The Committee on NGOs is composed of 19 member states, and meets twice a year to assess and vet CSO applications for consultative status with the UN.

Following the vetting process, the Committee on NGOs makes recommendations to the full UN ECOSOC which makes the final decisions on the selection of CSOs.

Thus far, through the work of the Committee on NGOs, the UN ECOSOC has granted observer status to 4,500 CSOs around the world, including international and national NGOs.

Eligibility Criteria

One of the key subjects of analysis at the workshop was the question of eligibility for CSO interested in doing business with, or participating in, intergovernmental organizations. The technical teams considered the selection conditions in place at the UN ECOSOC as input for the AU in developing its own set of criteria.

To be eligible for consultative status within the UN ECOSOC system, an NGO must meet the following conditions:

1. The organization must have been in existence, ie, officially recognized by a national government, for at least two (2) years.
2. The organization must have an established headquarters, a democratically-adopted constitution, authority to speak for its members, a representative structure, appropriate mechanisms of accountability and democratic and transparent decision-making processes.
3. The basic resources of the organization must be derived mainly from contributions of the national affiliates or other components or from individual members.

4. Organizations established by governments or intergovernmental agreements are not considered NGOs.

Application Process

The workshop also focused on the actual mechanics of the application process; focusing on critical parameters such as calls for application, processing times, and vetting procedures. In the UN ECOSOC system, the application process has the following key elements:

1. Applications received through the year, however the Committee on NGOs meet twice a year to consider and assess applications received up to that point.
2. The UN ECOSOC Secretariat operates a central database that manages all NGOs applying for consultative status. The database also includes organizations who have already been granted consultative status.
3. The application is composed of 21 technical questions in 3 areas: organizational overview, operations, and finances. Required background documentation includes registration paperwork, financial statements and governing instruments. The application forms and all background documentation are submitted online.
4. A preliminary review of applications is conducted by the ECOSOC Secretariat, and then submitted to the Committee on NGOs for substantive review and assessment; which is all completed through a paperless system.
5. The Committee on NGOs, following their comprehensive review and assessment of the CSO applications, prepares a report with their formal recommendations and submits them to the full ECOSOC chamber for adoption.
6. The full chamber of ECOSOC makes the final decision and retains the right to withhold membership even if the Committee on NGOs had made a positive recommendation.

Institutional Access and Scope Limitations

One of the key requirements for the AU accreditation mechanism is that of institution-wide access; i.e., once an organization is granted accreditation, it would be then have the ability to engage and interface with individual AU organs and specialized agencies. The technical workshop discussed the scope, including the limits, of such institutional access.

Within the UN ECOSOC system, once an NGO receives consultative status from ECOSOC, the follow-up communication and engagement proceeds from individual UN agencies wishing to engage the NGO in their activities. In other words, ECOSOC

serves as the entry point for the NGO into the UN, but it does not own the follow-up with the NGO once it has received status.

While an NGO with consultative status receives access to a wide range of UN agencies, there are two key limitations to access: consultative status does not open the door to Security Council and General Assembly proceedings.

Framework of Engagement between AU ECOSOCC and UN ECOSOC

In addition to committing to mutual support on the development of the AU's accreditation mechanism; the two sides agreed to ongoing technical cooperation on various elements of CSO participation, including:

1. Sensitization of civil society on key UN and AU programs including Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals:
2. Advocacy, monitoring and ensuring accountability of member state implementation or ratification of international conventions and charters.
3. Mutual participation in activities of interest, including the UN High Level Political Forum on sustainable development; which is the main follow-up mechanism on the implementation of the SDGs. The two sides also agreed for AU ECOSOCC participation in activities related to the implementation of the agenda of the current President of UN ECOSOC, H.E. Frederick Shava, which focuses on sustainable industrialization and innovation. AU ECOSOCC participation was strongly encouraged in preparatory meetings Dakar, Senegal; and Livingstone, Zambia; planned for the first half of 2017.

Meeting with President of UN ECOSOC

Following the technical workshop, the AU team paid a courtesy call on the President of UN ECOSOC, His Excellency Frederick Shava.

The AU delegation informed Ambassador Shava of the mandate entrusted by the policy organs of the AU on ECOSOCC to act as the coordinator of civil society participation in the AU by developing a harmonized mechanism for accrediting civil society actors wishing to do business with the AU; and briefed him on the technical consultations that the AU delegation had accomplished with the UN ECOSOC Secretariat. The AU delegation congratulated Ambassador Shava on the focus of his presidency – sustainable industrialization and innovation – and assured him of the support of African civil society and AU ECOSOCC.

Ambassador Shava, who is also the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Zimbabwe to the United Nations, took the opportunity to formally welcome the AU delegation and expressed his support for continuing engagement between the two bodies. Ambassador Shava assured the AU delegation of the support of the UN ECOSOC and reiterated his preparedness and that of the UN ECOSOC Secretariat to assist and support the AU delegation in carrying out its

implementation of the Assembly decision to develop a CSO accreditation mechanism for the African Union.

A press release on this meeting is enclosed in Appendix A.

Next Steps:

The technical equipped the AU team with an in-depth understanding of the processes, systems, resources required to develop an institutional mechanism for the accreditation of CSOs seeking to engage the AU. The UN ECOSOC process provided an invaluable model with many key elements that can inform AU ECOSOCC's work in developing an AU mechanism; recognizing the inherent differences presented by the fact that the UN ECOSOC is an inter-governmental body made up of member states, whereas the AU ECOSOCC is a CSO organ driven by non-state actors.

The AU team, based on its own desk research as well as the findings from the technical workshop, will proceed to the drafting phase with the objective of finalizing a draft accreditation mechanism for review and adoption by the policy organs at the July Summit in 2017.



Appendix A

PRESS RELEASE

AU ECOSOCC AND UN ECOSOC HOLD PARTNERSHIP DISCUSSIONS

New York, 6 December 2016 – A delegation from the African Union led by the Presiding Officer of the Economic Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOC), Mr. Joseph Chilengi, has held partnership discussions with the President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Ambassador Frederic M.M. Shava, at the UN Headquarters in New York.

The AU delegation, also including Ambassador Lazarous Kapambwe, Economic Advisor to the Chairperson of the AU Commission, informed Ambassador Shava of the mandate entrusted by the policy organs of the AU on ECOSOCC to act as the coordinator of civil society participation in the AU by developing a harmonized mechanism for accrediting civil society actors wishing to do business with the AU. At present the African Union does not operate a centralized entry point for CSO engagement with AU organs and specialized agencies, similar to the role played UN ECOSOC for CSO participation with UN agencies. The AU delegation was therefore undertaking a fact-finding mission to understand the mechanisms and systems by which the UN ECOSOC manages and stewards CSO participation on behalf of the UN. As part of the mission the delegation paid a courtesy call on Ambassador Shava to express appreciation for the facilities and support accorded to the team by the UN ECOSOC Secretariat.

The Presiding Officer briefed Ambassador Shava on the technical consultations that the AU delegation had accomplished with the UN ECOSOC Secretariat and congratulated him on the focus of his presidency – sustainable industrialization and innovation – assuring the UN ECOSOC President of the support of African civil society and AU ECOSOCC.

Mr. Chilengi took the opportunity to brief Ambassador Shava on the composition, structure, mandate and working methods of the AU ECOSOCC, as well as the conditions informing the Decision of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government to direct ECOSOC to develop an institutional accreditation mechanism for CSOs wishing to engage the AU.

The Presiding Officer reiterated the desire, expressed initially in the AU delegation's technical meeting with the UN ECOSOC Secretariat, for both bodies to initiate an annual engagement mechanism to reinforce each other's programs. He also extended an invitation to Ambassador Shava to the next General Assembly of AU ECOSOCC to offer a message of solidarity and counsel to his AU counterparts.

Ambassador Shava, who is also the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Zimbabwe to the United Nations, took the opportunity to formally welcome the AU delegation and expressed his support for continuing engagement between the two bodies.

The ECOSOC President highlighted the fact that commonalities exist between the UN ECOSOCC and its AU counterpart, even if their constitutive structures are different. He reiterated the important role that the UN ECOSOC's Committee on NGOs plays in managing, vetting and stewarding the UN relationship with civil society. Ambassador Shava noted the high level of interest from CSOs around the world in securing observer status through UN ECOSOC and encouraged AU ECOSOCC to compare notes to learn best practices, ensuring that this exchange of ideas is undertaken in recognition of the differences and similarities of the two bodies.

He also called on an observer role for AU ECOSOCC under the auspices of the AU Permanent Observer Mission to the UN in order to strengthen cooperation.

Ambassador Shava assured the AU delegation of the support of the UN ECOSOC and reiterated his preparedness and that of the UN ECOSOC Secretariat to assist and support the AU delegation in carrying out its implementation of the Assembly decision to develop a CSO accreditation mechanism for the African Union.

He further thanked Mr. Chilengi for his invitation to the ECOSOCC General Assembly and indicated his office will explore the possibility of his participation.

Ambassador Shava highlighted the fact that the theme of his presidency - sustainable industrialization and innovation - are themes that affected all African countries, and aligned with the AU's own industrialization agenda as well. He therefore expressed a hope for increased synergies between the AU and UN developmental agendas, particularly as they related to industrialization and innovation.

The UN ECOSOC President, for his part, extended an invitation to AU ECOSOCC to participate in upcoming UN meetings on industrialization and agricultural mechanization; and assured the delegation of continued interaction and communication in the pursuit of closer cooperation.

For more information, please contact:

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