

DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE:



## 15<sup>th</sup> Southern African Civil Society Forum (CSF)

13 – 15 August 2019, Dar Es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania

**Theme- TBC**

***“Claiming Our Common Future”***



### Introduction

The 15<sup>th</sup> Southern Africa Civil Society Forum (CSF) will take place from the 13 – 15<sup>th</sup> August 2019 in the Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania. Southern African Development Community - Council of Non-Governmental Organizations (SADC-CNGO) is an Apex body of Non-governmental Organisations in the Southern African region (SADC). It is the regional body of national NGO umbrella formations within SADC’s 15 Member States as well as various thematic networks which work on issue or sector specific areas in the region. The SADC CNGO has a formal alliance with faith-based (FOCCISA – Fellowship of Christian Councils of Southern Africa) and trade union (SATUCC – Southern African Trade Union Coordinating Council) bodies in the region, with whom it jointly convenes the annual Southern African Civil Society Forum (CSF). A regional and national steering committee operationalises the hosting of the forum and provides overall strategic direction to the process. The Steering Committee is inclusive of regional thematic networks, regional campaigns and advocacy groups as well as formations hosting or sponsoring thematic cafes or side events.

The CSF has been hosted annually for the past 15 years and is the main event for civil society in the region to analyse current developments, elaborate common strategies and foster solidarity between the civil society actors in pursuit of greater and more impactful engagement with SADC at regional and national levels.

## Background

*"...civil society is not only likely to build regionalism 'from below,' but also that some processes within the civil society arena can lead to meaningful contestations of existing regionalism paradigms and contribute to reshaping regions in line with 'alternative' agendas." (Fioramonti; 2014)*

Regional integration remains an immense challenge in Southern Africa. It is widely recognized that state and inter-governmental institutions are grappling with giving effect to their mandate and are deeply challenged by their specific commitments towards participation by non-State actors such as the various provisions of the SADC Charter.

The disconnect between citizens and states must be understood and appropriately addressed, not only by civil society but by SADC and its institutions. SADC, while it is a product of governments, is an institution of all citizens, stakeholders and actors in the region. Citizen's participation is a necessary condition for peace; justice and sustainable development and people are active change agents and role-players in achieving these outcomes.

The CSF is a platform for dialogue and reflection on issues affecting the citizens of the region. It is a critical voice in prompting accountability on the part of SADC and strengthening people-centred regional development. The 15th CSF builds on the previous forums that have over the years developed distinct value-adding dimensions which are unique, including that:

- *The CSF builds consensus and unity on the burning issues facing CSO in the region and address itself in particular to the challenges and opportunities facing regional integration.*
- *The CSF contributes towards a common and shared plan of action on agreed priorities for CSO in Southern Africa.*
- *The CSF fosters solidarity and unity amongst the diverse communities of interest and facilitates cross-sectoral unity and understanding amongst CSO.*
- *The CSF holds the organisations of civil society accountable for the mutual and agreed actions and inculcates a culture of transparency in the affairs of CSO in Southern Africa.*

A detailed Plan of Action was adopted at the 14<sup>th</sup> CSF in Namibia in 2018. The CSF at that time changed in the modalities and programme to address the growing and changing needs of civil society actors, such as the introduction of Thematic Cafes. These innovations have been widely welcomed by participants and stakeholders

However, the review of the 14<sup>th</sup> CSF highlighted several key learnings, most important being:

*"...a call for the forum to go beyond merely reporting on issues, but to define **its strategic thrust more clearly**. This was important for the Alliance to ensure that civil society engaged shared the same vision, as well as helpful in minimizing conflict and potential challenges in addressing emerging issues."*

In line with this consensus the CSF, the approach and methodology will be adjusted to provide improved clarity, cohesion and impact.

## Objectives of the 15<sup>th</sup> CSF

The 15<sup>th</sup> CSF will therefore address itself to the key question of purpose and cohesion amongst civil society formations; how these relate to the SADC institutional architecture and regional integration and development agenda. The focus of the 15<sup>th</sup> CSF is internal and honest reflection in respect of:

- Defining coordination and cooperation mechanism between the components of civil society (NGOs, Trade Unions, Faith Organisations, Business and social movements in the SADC region)
- Clarification of the principles guiding the engagement and partnerships between these actors and participants of the CSF;
- Defining the values and ethics that unite civil society and the CSF;
- Reflecting on how best to transform the CSF into a more effective platform.

The key focus areas are thus:

- Create shared spaces for diverse voices from all sections of civil society to engage, learn and dialogue
- Create better understanding and facilitate alliance building amongst civil society formations at national, regional and continental levels
- Create specific youth and women spaces and platforms for engagement, learning and leadership

In order to best address these issues, the 15<sup>th</sup> CSF will focus on the follow areas:

### **b) Strengthening partnerships and alliances for**

- Defining values, principles and modalities of local, regional and continental cooperation within civil society stakeholders and how they are expressed and held by the CSF
- Defining coordination and solidarity mechanisms for CS in the region and the role of the CSF

### **c) Strengthening effective engagement with SADC**

- Leveraging space for participation within SADC
- Mobilizing civil society in support institutional mechanism
- Mapping processes and opportunities for continental coordination

The 15<sup>th</sup> CSF will also:

1. Take stock of the Civil Society Forum as the premier gathering of CSOs in the region and evaluate the successes, challenges and opportunities presented in the development of the region;
2. Review strategies that amplify the voice of a unified civil society towards the realisation of the SADC agenda on regional integration;
3. Provide a platform to showcase the work of civil society, to promote dialogue and awareness on the best practices and key areas of work;

4. Foster the spirit of solidarity among the people of the region and provide an information sharing platform for civil society working in different areas of regional development;
5. Identify concrete actions to enhance the interface between civil society, SADC institutions and political leadership in the SADC region in order to foster common appreciation of our challenges as a region and continent.

The format of the 15<sup>th</sup> CSF will be in two parts:

1) **CSF Exhibition: #SADCOpenSpace**

In order to accommodate the wide range of thematic networks and specific focus groups which wish to highlight their specific areas of work, an CS Exhibition day will be hosted for the first time. The side-events which organizations wish to hold will now be concentrated on day and be curated by the Steering Committee.

1) **Youth Parliament**

The CSF will host its second university debate tournament, showcasing a SADC Youth Parliament, where young people will engage the official SADC Heads of State agenda and deliver their verdict on the current arrangements and elaborate their vision of our future.

2) **CSF Formal Proceeding**

The formal proceedings of the CSF will be held in a one day meeting with two plenary sessions, followed by commissions and working groups related to the above mentioned focus areas, namely, internal reflection of the CSF by participants and the role of the CSF in promoting effective engagement with SADC.

### Adoption of a Roadmap

Based on the previous Plan of Action, the CSF will adopt a roadmap that clearly articulates the future actions of the CSF and its participants, based on the internal reflection and engagement plan for SADC.

### CSF Process

1. **Invitation to participate:** Fraternal and allied formations are invited to express interest in contributing to the hosting and programme development of the 15<sup>th</sup> CSF. Local, regional and international partners are invited.
2. **Steering Committee Meeting:** A Steering Committee meeting will be held to prepare for the forum and lay a concrete foundation for collaboration among apex organisations and regional thematic organisations, especially in the content of the forum.
3. **Consultative processes with civil society in Tanzania towards the 15<sup>th</sup> Civil Society Forum**
4. **Consultative process with East African Civil Society Forum and other regional/continental partners to promote co-sharing and learning across East and Southern Africa**
5. **Pre-forum strategy and programme:** Engagement with a variety of SADC Member States and Secretariat, including host government, SADC Parliamentary Forum, Political parties, SADC business forum to consult and discuss appropriate strategies and approaches towards the forum, including push towards institutionalizing and recognizing the strategic role of civil society participation and involvement in SADC processes.
6. **Civil Society Forum:** The forum will be held August 2019 in Tanzania

7. **Post Forum review meeting:** A post forum meeting will be held in September to review the roadmap for implementing the outcomes of the civil society forum.

**ENDS**

Please reply below with comments and contributions:

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