



Civil Society Forum Statement to Africities 9 Summit

Kisumu, 17–21 May 2022

Stakeholder engagement and African cities

Civil society groups convened at the Civil Society Forum for the Africities 9, Kisumu, 15th, and 16th May 2022, discussed the issue of stakeholder engagement, pertaining to the theme of the Summit, “The role of intermediary cities of Africa in the implementation of the United Nations (UN) Agenda 2030 and the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063.”

The Forum addressed three key questions. They are as follows:

- What is the mention of stakeholder engagement, direct or indirect, in the UN Agenda 2030 and the AU Agenda 2063?
- What is the existing situation of stakeholder engagement in the African cities?
- What are the courses of action aimed at changing the existing situation into the desired one?

Mention of the issue

The importance of participation is emphasized throughout the 2030 Agenda. The Preamble invokes “a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused, in particular, on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable, and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.”¹

The SDGs include specific targets on participation, notably:

5.5 Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life²;

6.b Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management³;

11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries⁴;

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels⁵;

17.7. Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.⁶

Aspiration 6 of the AU Agenda affirms citizen engagement and reiterates it elsewhere. It calls for:

“An Africa whose development is people driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children—By 2063, Africa will be a continent where all citizens will be actively involved in decision-making in all aspects of development,

including social, economic, political and environmental. Africa will be a continent where no child, woman or man will be left behind.”⁷

The AU has noted how “Experience from the implementation of past continental frameworks (i.e., Lagos Plan of Action, Abuja Treaty) shows that the citizens of Africa must own the process and outcome of Agenda 2063; also, capacities of all stakeholders have to be built for implementation.”⁸

The UN has advised that “The success of our collective journey to 2030 will greatly depend on how effectively Governments, who are in the driving seat of implementation of this transformative and universal agenda, engage [stakeholders] in follow-up and implementation efforts and bridge the gap between people’s needs and national policy setting.”⁹

Existing situation

The multistakeholder nature of the AU Agenda 2063 and the UN Agenda 2030 demand an enabling political environment from the local, or city, to the national levels, for a purposeful, inclusive, transformative, and proactive stakeholder engagement. Public participation, above all, is an imperative of democratic governance. It is a political commitment of governments at all levels. The chain of aspirations of the UN and AU Agendas is only as strong as its stakeholder engagement link.

We are concerned at the organization of Africities⁹ and conditions for admission have discouraged—even foreclosed—the participation of civil society and the citizen inhabitants of African cities.

Courses of action

Stakeholder engagement is the process by which an organization involves people who may be affected by the decisions it makes, or can influence the implementation of its decisions. The organizations in question are the public institutions of cities and local government. Realising the UN and AU agendas in the city sphere depends on how effectively local governments engage the multiple stakeholders, which calls for strengthening the capacity of local governments in stakeholder-engagement management.

The term ‘engagement’ of citizens or stakeholders is often used without attention to the requisite of distributing citizens’ or communities’ power in relation to decision-making authorities and processes.¹⁰ Engagement encompasses a wide range of policies, practices, behaviors, cultures and their associated institutions. In its broadest sense, stakeholder engagement may also span certain negative practices. Therefore, more precision is needed.

Stakeholder engagement implies a willingness to listen and to discuss issues of interest to stakeholders of the organisation and, crucially, the organisation has to be prepared to consider changing what it aims to achieve and how it operates as a result of stakeholder engagement.¹¹ Such processes hold the potential of creating synergies that combine perspectives to produce a plan and outcomes greater than its parts.

Stakeholder engagement is distinct from stakeholder management. While the leadership of an organisation is still needed to set the direction for its development, it should do so in the knowledge of stakeholders' wants and needs (SWANS), as well as the organisation's wants and needs (OWANS). Successful management thus becomes the art of optimising long-term benefits based on reconciling sometimes-disparate stakeholders' wants and needs.¹²

In its own interests and in the interest of democratic governance, civil society in African cities does not seek stakeholder engagement with local authorities and governments in the vague sense of the term. Rather, it seeks negotiation through transparent and well-functioning structures (e.g., joint policy boards, advisory councils and planning committees, etc.). That way, stakeholder management becomes a participatory two-way street and a joint responsibility shared with citizens.

The need for effective stakeholder management remains unfulfilled and a big gap in local governance across Africa. Therefore, civil society petitions the Summit and UCLG Africa to take urgent action to fill this gap in political environments to enable equitable and effective deliberation in the spirit and function of partnership, both within cities and in the Africities Summit.

At Kisumu, Kenya
16 May 2022

Endnotes

- 1 General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), A/RES/70/1, "Partnership," <https://daccess-ods.un.org/tmp/7528936.26689911.html>.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 7 African Union, Agenda 2063, "Our Aspirations for the Africa We Want," <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/aspirations>.
- 8 "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, Background Note 1" (AU, 2014), p. 16, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-01_background_note.pdf.
- 9 UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), *Stakeholder engagement and the Agenda 2030: A practical guide*, (UN DESA and UNITAR, UN 2020), p. 5, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2703For_distribution_Stakeholder_Engagement_Practical_Guide_spreads_2.pdf.
- 10 *See Ibid.*
- 11 Neil Jeffrey, *Stakeholder Engagement: A Road Map to Meaningful Engagement*, #2 in the Doughty Centre 'How to do Corporate Responsibility' Series (Bedford, England: Doughty Centre, Cranfield University School of Management, July 2009), p. 3, <https://www.fundacionseres.org/lists/informes/attachments/1118/stakeholder%20engagement.pdf>.
- 12 *Ibid.*