

Conclusions of the Civil Society Days

6th and 7th May

As it has been underlined by Cyrille Pierre from the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, several initiatives have been taken in order to strengthen the role of CSOs in global governance and in the AU-EU partnership (2018 Peace Forum, Equality Generation Forum of Mexico, Mediterranean Worlds Forum, Montpellier Summit). Yet, if we want to achieve a partnership of equals, we should work towards greater hybridization of ideas, which implies to better involve civil society in decision-making, implementing and monitoring processes. In this view, both speakers and members of the discussion groups putted forward various frameworks where actions have to be taken.

First, several stakeholders stressed the need to rethink the relationship between CSOs and political actors, but also between Africa and Europe. According to Leya Dakhli, Historian for the National Scientific Research Centre Wealth of Civil Societies Organisations, hierarchy of scales between society and governments has continued to create a sense of powerlessness that puts individuals in a position where they do not feel they have the capacity to access funds or territories (mobility). Rethinking this interconnection thus implies to further take into consideration local knowledge and concrete realities, as well as to ensure proper local appropriateness of issues. According to Achille Mbembe, Historian & Specialist in postcolonial issues, the new paradigm of EU-AU partnership requires major changes in the EU's and France's geopolitical role in Africa by giving more substance to mutualization diplomacy. In this view, a new generation of tools and a new language must be implemented to initiate an intellectual rearmament. In addition, the focus of diplomacy should be placed on global issues (climate change, protection of biodiversity, food security, digital, governance of financial and international institutions) rather than on the projection of military influence or the pursuit of political and economic interests.

Besides a change of paradigm, the conference shed light on the need to think about concrete modalities that favor an enhanced CSOs engagement in AU-EU partnership. Several speakers such as Dr. Moses Isoba, Executive Director of Uganda National NGO Forum or Sylvie Capitant, Deputy Director of IEDES-Université Paris 1, highlighted the increasingly shrinking operational and even physical space for civil society organizations. CSOs are facing numerous obstacles that hamper their ability to act (lengthy procedures, sabotage, NGO imbalance, staff safety, issue of freedom of speech). Furthermore, and as pointed out by Domenico Rosa from the DG INTPA, it appears that the EU-AU Summit did not define a clear format for civil society consultation.

On the fight against climate change: Several panelists underlined that climate change is not affecting Europe and Africa to the same extend. The direct effects of climate change are highly perceptible in Africa, with important consequences on migrations, conflicts, food security and land shortages. This multidimensional crisis hence has to be tackled through an integrated approach in EU policies implemented in Africa. In this regards, Rachel Simon from CAN Europe regretted that the recently launched Global Gateway lacks focus on climate adaptations and does not sufficiently involve CSOs. Similarly, Guillaume Quelin, climate change project manager for GRET, argued that EU fundings in West Africa are not adapted to local realities, notably due to a lack of cooperation with CSOs on the ground.

On the inclusion of youth and women: As pointed out by Maimouna Ba, President, Women for Dignity of the Sahel Association, women face manifold dangers in the Sahel region on an economic, social, cultural, and security level. At the same time, they represent important actors for social change, if given the right tools and means, and provided they have the autonomy. In this context, the access of youth and women in CSOs should be supported not only by financial means but by a variety of instruments in all areas. An essential part of

allowing young people to become active as changemakers is making sure they have access to the political and civil spaces as well as the space to learn and to navigate, without being tokenized by institutions.

Recommendations

Ensure effective information-sharing and communication:

- Provide the frameworks for regular exchange of information in all projects' phases (not only during the implementation but also during the designing and monitoring processes);
- Provide the CSOs with the necessary information on the processes so that they are fully aware of their possibilities to engage in these latter;
- Create a data base gathering CSOs by sectors, which would allow calls for tender on specific goals and priorities;
- Promote exchange of experience among CSOs, which would allow to exchange best practices on method and processes but also to better match the needs of local populations;
- Provide frameworks to openly communicate on postcolonial issues and to ensure that the implementation of the 2063 agenda matches Africa's needs.

Improve the enabling environment for civil society:

- Enshrine civil society consultation in all phases of the policy-making process and implementation through specific mechanisms;
- Conduct consultations on specific themes, rather than consultation covering 360 degrees of development action;
- Systematically involve CSOs in the preparation of the joint steering committee in order to examine the delivery of commitments taken during the Summit; this engagement could be facilitated by the designation of a representative for CSOs;
- Identify and tackle structural impediments that hamper CSOs (lengthy procedures, sabotage, NGO imbalance, staff safety, issue of freedom of speech).

Improve accountability and transparency:

- Design mechanisms to ensure more accountability of decision-makers through increased consultation of civil society at all levels (continental, regional, national and local)
- Increase transparency through regular reports to civil society on the follow-up of projects;
- Go beyond big announcements by placing a greater focus on the deliverables of all decisions taken at the political level;

Improve access and ensure inclusion:

- Work with the EU Delegations to figure out ways to create new participation opportunities for CSOs;
- Ensure that consultation processes are known and accessible to all (women, youth, people with disabilities, other minorities);
- Work towards greater inclusion of people with disabilities and design projects that specifically target their needs;
- Go beyond the sole economic empowerment of women by paying greater attention to social issues such as social protection or parental leave.
- Promote the financing of projects directly designed by local CSOs

Strengthen the agenda of climate change

- Work towards innovative solutions that match Africa's specific needs in all climate-related sectors (e.g., energy transition, decarbonization, etc);
- Give space for all actors to choose their own words and narrative around climate change, so true equity in the partnership can be allowed for;
- Put a greater focus on impact, adaptation, loss and damages;
- Link new initiatives to existing frameworks and efforts (e.g. AFR100, GGWI...);

- Follow a human rights-based bottom-up approach when implementing projects and agendas, notably through greater collaboration with local authorities;
- Strengthen efforts to avoid tax dodging of the private sector.