

The Pan-Africa Conference of Civil Society¹

Organisations: Issues for Consideration

At the Pan Africa NGO meeting of 12-14 October 2001, held in Nairobi, Kenya, the idea of a Pan Africa Conference of civil society organisations was accepted. At the meeting it was agreed that the national focal point for the WSSD in Kenya (the Kenya National Steering Committee - KNSC) should be the host for the Conference. A person would be appointed in the office of the KNSC to coordinate the logistics of the meeting. It was also agreed that KNSC would coordinate the development of an agenda for the meeting, and that it would undertake this task in consultation with other national and sub-regional focal points.

The dates of **17th to 20 December 2001** were agreed upon, and **Nairobi** was agreed as the place for the Conference.

In the course of its discussion, the meeting of October identified a number of objectives for the conference, as well as key themes that need to be taken up in the conference. The first part of this concept paper deals with themes objectives, and the outcomes of the conference in the light of the objectives. The second part deals with the composition of the Conference, the third part with the need for a meeting between representatives of sub-

¹ Throughout this document the term "civil society" will be used to encompass non-governmental organisations, community based organisation in both rural and urban areas, organisations of workers (trade unions), faith based organisations, youth organisations – (which include student organizations), women's organisations, first nation people (indigenous people), as well as various sub-groups to be found within them. "Civil society" in this context does not include business organisations and other market orientated organisations.

This exclusion does not preclude the organisations in the Pan African Conference devising strategies to engage and relate to certain market orientated organisations as part of the strategy of advancing the cause of sustainable development on the continent.

regional focal points and the Civil Society Secretariat based in Johannesburg. Lastly we deal with preparatory work that we need to do before the December Conference.

1. The Objectives and Outcomes of the Pan-Africa Conference 2001

The objectives of the Pan Africa Conference of Civil Society can be clustered in to three broad categories.

- i. The strengthening of African civil society
- ii. The development of a common African civil society position in the context of the WSSD and beyond
- iii. The development of a strategy for African civil society's engagement and participation in the WSSD process.

These objectives can be broken down further into a number of sub-objectives.

i. Strengthening African Civil Society

The important issues under this aspect of the Conference's objectives were that the conference should provide the space and opportunity for:

- ✓ addressing the weaknesses of African civil society organisations and NGOs.
- ✓ dialogue among networks and civil society organisations in Africa.
- ✓ discussion on how to build social movements in Africa.
- ✓ African civil society organisations to find ways to overcome their legacy of acting in an uncoordinated manner – which in the past has lead to disjointed efforts in major events like the WSSD.

ii. Development of a common African civil society position

The conference was also seen as an opportunity for African civil society organisations to speak with one voice about the major political and other challenges facing the continent. In particular, the meeting saw the development of a common African (civil society) *political agenda* for the WSSD being important and to act as a continuation of the previous activities by the Pan Africa (which met in Nairobi on 12TH to 14TH October).

The meeting emphasised the fact that the Pan Africa Conference must be seen as the initiation of a process that will lead to other Pan Africa meetings and gatherings. For this reason the Pan Africa conference will link up with processes of wide consultation with the people of the continent, in particular through the various national and sub-regional processes currently underway in the context of the WSSD.

Within this context, a number of key themes were identified for deliberation by the Pan Africa Conference. The themes fall into two broad categories:

- a. To review the achievements and drawbacks of sustainable development initiatives 10 years after the Rio summit.
- b. To come up with an African perspective on sustainable development.

The first theme allows us to engage in discussion, and develop our position on a key issues that has dominated development discussions over the last decade – the issue of **globalisation**. Of course, the issue of globalisation is not only relevant for the development of a balance sheet of the resolutions of the Earth Summit, but it is also relevant to the development of an Africa perspective of sustainable development in the current context.

The second theme gives us the opportunity to engage in discussion regarding the place of African civil society organisations and develop our common position on the **New African Initiative**, now renamed as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (**Nepad**). Nepad is strongly emerging as a political platform that is being promoted as the path toward sustainable development in Africa. Not only has it gained the support of the African Union, but it is

increasingly gaining support among the governments of the North and the various Multilateral Institutions.

The development of common political positions that Africa civil society can present at the summit in Johannesburg in 2002, and at other meetings leading to Johannesburg 2002, will have to take place over a number of phases.

We suggest that the development of common positions for African civil society organisations take place in **three phases**. The proposal for the three phases is motivated by the fact that it will not be possible to develop the position at one go at the December 2001 Pan Africa Conference.

Phase 1: A common political framework for African civil society [present to end January 2002]

The **first phase** in the development of a common position for African civil society should focus on developing a **common political framework** within which a range of specific positions could be developed. The discussion on the common political framework should take place at the Pan Africa Conference in December. The development of a common framework should focus on three items:

- ✓ A discussion on a review of achievements and problems 10 years after Rio.
- ✓ A discussion on our view of globalisation.
- ✓ A discussion on the New Africa Initiative/Nepad, and compare it to other global initiatives, e.g. the Global Deal fronted by the European Union.

Phase 11: Positions on key issues identified by African civil society [End January 2002 to end March 2002]

The development of a common position on African perspective on sustainable development will require the integration of the political framework with position on the specific issues that have been identified by African civil society organisations. Such specific positions could cover for example the range of issues covered under the various chapters of Agenda 21. The

development of such specific positions would then make up the **second phase** of the development of the common Africa civil society position.

As these positions – given their scope and variety – could not be developed at the December conference, one of the objectives of the Pan Africa Conference would be to work out a process of producing positions on these issues.

Given that different sub-regions and different countries – indeed different civil society organisations engaged in the WSSD process – have identified a range of positions that they would want to work on, a related task for the conference in December will be to agree on a list of **priority issues** that African civil organisations would like to take to Johannesburg as common positions. The work of phase two for African civil society would then focus on this list of agreed priorities. For proposals about this process see the discussion below under the section “The development of a strategy for African civil society’s engagement and participation in the WSSD process”.

Phase 111: A Pan Africa Conference of Civil Society in 2002 [mid-April]

The **third phase** of the development of common positions for African civil society would be a second Pan Africa Conference of civil society organisations. This conference would take place in 2002, preferably in advance of the Fourth Prep-Com, which will take place at the end of May 2002. The Pan Africa Conference will have to be in time to engage the formulation of the agenda for the Ngo Forum, and for the Government process: both agendas will likely be finalized at the Forth Prep-Com.

The second Pan Africa Conference will also:

Agree on our input into the discussions on the agenda for the WSSD.
Agree on how the Africa common positions will be presented and contested at the Summit in Johannesburg, and
Finalise a lobby strategy that will mobilize support for the Africa civil society common position.

iii. A strategy for African civil society's engagement in the WSSD process

The Pan Africa Conference in December provides us with an opportunity to develop a strategy for our engagement and participation in the WSSD process. In this light the conference should deal with a number of questions and arrive at common positions:

a. Formulating a common platform for Jhb2002

In the section on developing a common Africa position (above) we suggested that between December and May 2002 we should be able to produce common position on a number of issues that will be identified and prioritised by the conference in December. The conference must therefore produce **a timetable for discussions** that will culminate in the second Pan Africa conference.

We suggest that in order to facilitate this process we should draw on the resources that already exist on the continent. In particular, there are a number of continent-wide or sub-regional networks that are engaged in work around themes that are relevant to our concerns around sustainable development. Examples of two such networks are the Third World Network, NESDA, Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED) and Jubilee 2000. Not only do these networks provide the African process with experience on a number of key issues, but their international links also provide African civil society with conduits for engaging other progressive forces in other regions of the world.

We therefore suggest that representatives from these networks be invited to the December conference.

b. A strategy to mobilise support for our common position within Africa

The conference also provides us with the opportunity to develop a strategy to canvass our common position among other sectors in Africa who are not part of the Pan Africa Civil Society alliance. Some of the sectors that we might want to canvass or lobby are African artist, scientists, writers and so

on. We might also want to canvass support among organisations who are orientated to the market, but whose interests we might feel are close to the large majority of the poor on the continent. An example of such groups would be organisations of small peasant farmers.

This part of the conference's work would also look at how we plan to engage African governments.

c. Development of a common position towards the WSSD preparatory process

As African civil society we need to develop a common approach to the Preparatory Committee meetings of the WSSD process. We need to deal with how we will ensure that our voices are heard and taken seriously within those processes.

Two elements of this process need to be addressed at the conference. The first is how we plan to approach the coming PrepCom 2 at the end of January 2002. This PrepCom will focus on the review of the Rio Summit, a topic that will be dealt with in the conference. We need to take stock of our representation at the PrepCom, and devise a strategy for intervention. This is particularly important given the fact that when we meet in December the deadline for submission of paper for the review will have passed.

The second issue we need to address concerns the composition of the International Steering Committee for the Global NGO Forum, as well as our participation within it.

d. Alliance building in the context of Jhb2002 and beyond

The lobbying of various parties within the formal UN process constitutes only one elements of our process of alliance building with UN Agencies, Intergovernmental Forums (e.g. G77, China, EU). In the Pan Africa NGO meeting in October we noted the need to look beyond Jhb2002 and towards strategies for ensuring implementation of the decisions of Jhb2002.

It will be important for us to take the opportunity of the December conference to identify allies who are close to our own positions. We need to identify allies outside Africa and work out a strategy of how to engage them. In this instance we need an approach to two events that can facilitate this process of alliance building: the World Social Forum meeting in Porto Alegre, and the Southern Caucus of NGOs active in the WSSD process.

e. Election of a committee to coordinate the work of African Civil Society

The various outcomes and plans of the December conference will need to be followed up in between the December and the pre-PrepCom 4 Pan Africa meeting. The December conference needs to work out a way of coordinating the plans as well as ensuring implementation of decisions. A mechanism to undertake such coordination needs to be designed, and people elected to execute the work.

<p><i>2. Composition of the Pan Africa Civil Society Conference</i></p>
--

Representation at the conference needs to fulfill a number of criteria:

- It must ensure representation of the various WSSD processes currently taking place in the continent
- It must ensure that women are represented within the conference in proportions reflection our commitment to gender equity
- It must ensure that we are as inclusive as possible, and that the representatives reflect the sentiments and views of the areas from which they come
- It must ensure that we are able to mobilize the experience accumulated among various civil society organisations on the continent
- It must consider the principle of intergenerational equity and youth involvement.

For the WSSD process, Africa is divided into 6 sub-regions. These are SADC, Central Africa, West Africa, North Africa, Small Islands and

East/Eastern Africa. We suggest that the majority of the participants be chosen in the 6 sub-regions. **Each sub-region to send 10 delegates** to the Pan Africa Conference.

The **South African Civil Society Secretariat** be given **5 delegates** in the conference, so as to give input as the organizers of the Global NGO Forum.

Five other delegates come from networks working on various key issues on the continent. We suggest that each of the following networks gets one representative: Third World Network; Jubilee 2000; NESDA, RAED, Enda Graf, etc.

This representation of 70 participants should be made up of a fair composition of major groups (e.g. youth, women, indigenous people, etc.) **at least 25 women.**

Other resource people and facilitators would attend for the special functions they would perform.

3. Africa's Participation In The Global Event

Given that the Global Forum is being held in Africa we think that it would be useful to use the December Conference as an opportunity for a briefing meeting between the South African Civil Society Secretariat – in its capacity as organiser of the Global Forum – and representatives from sub-regional focal points.

The meeting would deal with a number of issues, including a report on the logistics in Jhb; the attendance of African civil society delegates – how many are we planning for?; the possibility of sharing resources (eg the use the WSSD Secretariat website as a clearing house for information on the African process), and other items.

This meeting will have to be organized as a “parallel” process, and the agenda and preparation needed will have to be circulated in advance.

4. Summary of Outcomes and Preparatory Work

The following are the outcomes that we envisage out of the Pan Africa Conference in December:

- A common position on the review of the Rio process
- A common position on the New Africa Initiative
- A common position on Globalisation
- A plan to develop common position on a list of priority issues identified by the conference
- A strategy and plan to mobilise support among other sectors in Africa
- A plan for intervention at the 2nd Global PrepCom in New York, Jan2002
- A position on the composition of the International Steering Committee, as well as on key aspects of its work
- A plan of intervention at Porto Allegre and in the Southern Caucus
- The election of a coordinating committee for the African Civil society process
- A date for the Second Pan Africa Conference, as well as the outlines of an agenda for the conference
- A meeting of sub-regional focal points and a plan towards Jhb2002

In order to facilitate the work at the December conference, we would request the various sub-regional focal points, and the networks invited to the conference, to prepare the following documents and forward them to the organisers of conference:

- i. The state of civil society in each country covered by the sub-region. This report should be produced by the national focal points in each country. A check list of issues to be covered will be forwarded soon. (2-3 pages at most)
- ii. State of WSSD preparations - country reports. Checklist to follow. (1-2 pages)
- iii. Sub-regional platforms - where they exist.
- iv. Sub-regional focal point reports on WSSD. (1-2pages; checklist to follow)

- v. Report from networks on state of work related to WSSD (2-3 pages; checklist to follow)
- vi. Key landmark events on the road to Jhb – to be produced by South African Civil Society Secretariat. (2-3pages; checklist to follow)

The checklists for what is to be included in each of the report will be with sub-regions within the week (latest by **Monday 19 November 2001**), and we suggest that the deadline for the submission of these reports be **Friday 30 November 2001**. This will allow enough time for these reports to feed into the final design of the conference, which should be done – with the necessary accompanying material, by **December 7 2001**. Delegates will therefore have time to look at the agenda of the conference before they leave their homes for Nairobi.

Conclusion

As can be seen from this concept paper on the conference, we are setting ourselves a rather ambitious agenda. We think with well-considered design of the conference we can achieve the expected outcomes.

As it is we are late with the logistics side of things, that is travel and accommodation, visas for those who will need them, nomination or election of participants and so on. We appeal for a response to these proposals by Friday 16 so that we could move, especially on the logistic side of the conference preparations.

By: KENYA NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE IN COLLABORATION with South Africa Civil Society Secretariat - Africa Desk