Africa
Forum on
Civil Society
and
Governance
Assessments

Dakar, 10-12 November 2011
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The Africa Civil Society and Governance Assessments Forum (Dakar, Senegal, 10-12 November 2011), organized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with TrustAfrica, CIVICUS (World Alliance for Citizen Participation), Africa Governance Institute and CONGAD (Conseil des ONGs d’appui au développement), brought together 150 development practitioners, academics, foundations, donor institutions, private sector and civil society representatives and UNDP staff from over 35 countries to engage in policy dialogue and collaborative initiatives. The three-day workshop reflected on African experiences with governance assessments, with a specific focus on civil society’s involvement in such initiatives.

The event was an opportunity for partners from Africa to share knowledge and experiences to enhance future contributions by civil society to various governance assessment initiatives. The success of this unique multidisciplinary and multi-actor forum, which generated intense internal and external interest in Africa as much as in other regions, reaffirms an important role for UNDP in support of participatory governance assessments in Africa and other regions. Participants are now reporting the formation of new strategic partnerships, the commissioning of new research and the launching of new activities at the country level.

Governance assessments and benchmarking have become an increasing priority for African policy makers, civil society groups and national development partners alike, especially in the last five to eight years. There is a consensus that governance assessments represent a powerful tool for diagnosing governance deficits and for citizens to have a voice on issues of concern. This has over the last decade prompted governments, national civil society organizations, international civil society organizations and development partners to invest in developing methodologies and executing governance assessments in nearly all countries. Given the wide range of available tools and disparities in their application in the African region, this regional workshop proved to be a timely opportunity to showcase African innovation and leadership in this area, and to critically examine current assessment practices in Africa.

Below are key messages from the three-day forum, grouped around the main theme for each day.

Why a conference on civil society and governance assessments now?

1. Executive summary
CSOs have become aware that policy engagement can often have a greater impact than contestation. Robust and credible governance data has great potential for strengthening civic engagement because it can help civil society gain a place at the policy table. In other words, civil society actors are more than data collectors: by using evidence effectively, they have the means to be co-producers of public policy. But how to ensure that the evidence gathered by CSOs has more impact on policy? Forum participants highlighted the need for more strategic and practical advice regarding evidence-based policy engagement. Some pointers included the need for CSOs to better assess opportunities for policy influence, and to supply relevant, current data that is presented at the “right” time and practical for policy makers to use. To overcome the problems associated with data consumption in Africa, civil society must not only master the numbers but also the change process and the politics associated with incorporating assessment findings into policy.

Assessments should be made an integral component of domestic political and administrative processes, but this hinges upon having access to information and the political will of public decision-makers to carry out change. One of the main factors identified by forum participants for enhancing the impact of an assessment related to the creation of multi-stakeholder partnerships. Bringing together progressive policy makers, parliamentarians, national oversight institutions, think tanks and the media can help gather more and better evidence, amplify little-known or little-understood issues and assemble coalitions for change, thus helping with policy influence. When government is part of the assessment from the beginning, the political will necessary for reform is easier to obtain.

To get from data to action, recent headway has been made with the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). But while CSOs are active in the early stages when the country’s report is compiled, they have been far less involved in the monitoring of the National Programme of Action (NPoA). Initiatives from Ghana, South Africa and Lesotho which have sought to establish monitoring systems in the post-Review phase, inclusive of the voices of civil society, and with effective feedback loops into policy-making, generated a lot of interest.

Overall, three main priorities for increasing the policy influence of CSOs through governance assessments were singled out during the forum: (1) strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to produce relevant, reliable and periodic data; (2) improve communication between data producers (think tanks, CSOs, national statistical offices) and data users (government, CSOs, parliaments, oversight institutions); and (3) establish coalitions between like-minded actors to implement evidence-based advocacy campaigns.
Before examining civil society assessments, it is important to recognize that civil society is heterogeneous with a multiplicity of actors with divergent goals, methodologies, and operating environments. It is not limited to a “sector” but is an integral part of the vibrant social and political life of any society. The right to assemble and freedom of speech are fundamental human rights, and citizens and civil society are entitled to exercise and uphold these rights. However, in Africa, as elsewhere in the world, civic spaces vary widely: some participants experience a minimum of dialogue between citizen and State in their home countries, while others must fight and are prosecuted for trying to keep that space open.

Regardless of the degree of openness, CSOs always face a question of legitimacy, and it is a valid question to ask. To become more legitimate and more effective, civil society organizations and movements must be representative and leaders need to consult with constituents; CSOs need to be transparent and accountable, in essence, they need to be democratic institutions; and they need to address accusations of manipulation for political or personal gain (citizens exploited by CSOs or CSOs exploited by government).

Participatory civil society assessments have been championed by CIVICUS and its Civil Society Index (CSI). The CSI has offered a unique opportunity for dialogue within civil society (in a given country) where participants gained a much greater understanding of their strengths and weaknesses as democratic actors. The latest CSI findings at the international level show the following trends: there is a widening gap between CSOs and citizens engaged in change, CSOs have an impact on the social sphere but less so on the political one, collaboration is critical, and civic spaces are in general volatile and weak. The CSI is entering its second stage of evolution, with a rapid assessment methodology, and will improve the tool by tailoring it to the national context, using a broad communications strategy, and having actionable goals incorporated into the process from the beginning. The first test of the new CSI approach is planned for Tunisia (see Box 3).

Ongoing monitoring activities by various stakeholders suggest that the enabling environment for civil society is shrinking. Forum participants explored ideas about how to detect threats to civic space through an early warning system. This generated many questions: how can social movements and CSOs work together? How can civil society assessments lead to action by the government to improve the enabling environment? Capacity development remains a priority for practitioners to be able to use data generated from an assessment and to negotiate for more policy influence.

During the second day, participants touched on the sometimes difficult relationship between CSOs and donor institutions where power dynamics are unequal. CSOs suggested that donors support local, indigenous initiatives and do not create new ones. Donors need to be patient, as the development of a strong civil society is a long process. Donors can sometimes address issues which are too [politically] sensitive for local actors (who might suffer life-threatening consequences).

Civil society across Africa is gaining in strength and effectiveness but still has a long road ahead to becoming a powerful voice in public policy. Civil society actors can use internal assessments to help them become effective change agents.
Panels during the final day of the forum focused on the growing role of new information and communications technologies (ICTs) in the collection, dissemination and storage of data. There is an enormous potential for the use of technology to nurture democratic processes by bringing citizens and government closer and lowering the boundaries to citizen participation. However, it was equally clear that technology is no panacea. It is a tool which needs to be well crafted to suit the capacities of targeted users and to obtain data efficiently, with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of governance and service delivery.

Voice and access need special attention when using ICTs, as it can exacerbate existing inequalities along geographical, economic or gender lines. Fears of confidentiality and data security are also crucial issues to address. Several fascinating case studies from Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya showed both the potential and the challenges to using ICTs. In an interesting turn, the “Made in Africa” label appeared to matter less for technology than the simple fact if it works (or not). Ownership is gained through accessibility because technology is global, not local.

Technology is the engine, but not the driver, and although it might be easy to turn the car on, driving to a specific place requires a whole other set of skills. In other words, creating a technological tool is easy, but getting people to use it can be very difficult. CSOs have to identify the right technology to go with the task they want to accomplish and must thoroughly understand what kinds of interface potential users are most likely to employ.

Seven technology-based social accountability tools were presented, mainly by private sector actors, during a «Live Toolbox» session. These presentations generated great enthusiasm among participants, who explored the possibilities of using them in their activities.

Given the enormous amount of practical information and ideas shared during the forum, the following are seven initial recommendations to continue the momentum while still leaving room for participants to discover other possibilities to apply what was learned about making civil society and governance assessments more effective:

1. Create an interactive virtual platform;
2. Publish mapping results and papers relating to the broad themes of the forum;
3. Pilot rapid civil society assessments;
4. Establish a network on preventive diplomacy regarding restrictive environments for civil society;
5. Support post-APRM assessments by civil society in francophone Africa;
6. Link civil society assessment data with the next round of UNDP-supported governance assessments;
7. Explore the possibilities of organizing similar fora in other regions.

For more information on the forum, please visit the forum website (www.beta.undp.org/undp/en/home/presscenter/events.2011/november/dakar_forum.html)
2. Background & forum design
UNDP believes that the success of development and democratic governance depends on both a robust state and an active, capable and healthy civil society.

Only such a strong civil society can play a collaborative rather than competitive role, be an interlocutor with governments and other partners and also play a watchdog role in the development process. Civic engagement is especially key to the work of UNDP in strengthening responsive, responsible and more accountable governance institutions and practices. It requires access to information, ability to gather and use evidence to inform its policy proposals and overall engagement with government.

Africa has undergone several socio-economic changes over the past decade, which have had the effect of increasing demands for democracy across the continent. People are frustrated with unemployment and poor public services, and what they see as a lack of accountability from their governments. The Arab Spring has given new momentum to movements for transparency and accountability. Although it remains a contentious one, the relationship between civil society and governments is changing, and there are instances of working in partnership on common developmental goals.

As a key tool for improving transparency and accountability, governance assessments and benchmarking have been an increasing priority for African policy makers, civil society groups and national and international development partners alike, especially in the last five to eight years. There is an emerging consensus amongst all stakeholders on the need to better measure and account for development results. This trend is itself a reflection of an international consensus to the effect that an improved understanding of the quality of governance in a country is critical to deliver on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and in particular the eradication of poverty and inequality. Governance assessments represent a powerful tool for diagnosing governance deficits and for citizens to have a voice on issues of concern.

The potential of new social accountability tools which make innovative use of new technologies and social media is rapidly gaining traction in Africa. Information and communications technology (ICT) platforms for monitoring and assessing governance have been praised for their potential to democratise assessment and reporting processes, and to promote broad-based engagement by reaching out to “everyday citizen” through digital media.

Against this backdrop, UNDP decided to organise a pan-African forum focusing on three main themes:

- Leveraging the power of partnerships for governance assessments
- Scrutinising the civil society context: Towards new forms of participatory assessment in an African context
- Sparking change: Technology and innovation in governance assessments

By holding this forum, UNDP intended to not only add to the body of knowledge on governance and civil society assessments, but also to connect a wide range of like-minded practitioners and experts involved in (or supporting) assessments on the continent – including civil society, research institutions, UNDP representatives, African institutions and developers of social accountability tools from the private sector. Speakers were selected from practitioners in civil society, leading analysts of African civil society and African governance assessment initiatives, governance experts and UNDP staff from Country Offices and regional centres.

The forum had 12 technical sessions including three breakout sessions (“Live Toolbox”) geared towards supplying detailed information about a specific issue, project or tool.
# Forum agenda:

**Day 1**  
**LEVERAGING THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS FOR GOVERNANCE ASSESSMENTS**

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<td>Anticipating the emerging role of governance data in shaping civic engagement landscape in the 21st century Africa</td>
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<td>Lead-up to APRM+10: Civil society strategies for influence and impact in the post-Review phase</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>From data to action – Civil society strategies to turn governance data into policy impact</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Measuring governance in selected thematic areas – country cases on gender, extractive industries, corruption and elections (Live Toolbox – Breakout session)</td>
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**Day 2**  
**SCRUTINISING THE CIVIL SOCIETY CONTEXT: TOWARDS NEW FORMS OF PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT**

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<td>Civic spaces in Africa – Past, present and future</td>
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<td>Learning from case experience of UNDP/civil society collaboration – translating data into policy impact</td>
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<td>Civil society capabilities towards governance in Africa – what is the picture and why is it so?</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Enabling environments for civil society: Capacity development for assessment and exposure to reform initiative and tools (Live Toolbox – Breakout session)</td>
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**Day 3**  
**SPARKING CHANGE: TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION IN GOVERNANCE ASSESSMENTS**

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<td>Digital platforms for inclusive participation – bridging boundaries or deepening divides?</td>
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<td>Matching tools with contexts (Live Toolbox – Breakout session)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Open Data in Africa – exploring the limits of access and transparency</td>
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The objectives of the forum were to:

1. Responded to the strong demand for information and partnerships in the field of civil society and governance assessments which promote social accountability;  
2. Created a unique opportunity for like-minded stakeholders from all over Africa to come together for the first time, acquire knowledge, build bridges, and exchange experiences on governance assessments, while showcasing African leadership and innovation in the field;  
3. Facilitate exchange of innovative experiences, knowledge and strategies among practitioners from civil society, research institutions and UNDP offices in Africa.

It is envisaged that the forum and its outcomes will lay the groundwork for longer-term engagement by UNDP on issues of governance and civil society assessments and social accountability with multiple actors, including civil society, research institutions, national governments and other development partners.

The forum was organised by the UNDP with four leading partners in the field of civil society and governance: TrustAfrica, CIVICUS, CONGAD and the African Governance Institute, with support from the UNDP-France Trust Fund. The UNDP units involved were the Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy/ Civil Society Division, the Bureau for Development Policy/ Oslo Governance Centre and the Regional Bureau for Africa/ Dakar and Johannesburg regional centres.

Key results of the forum include the following:

1. Responded to the strong demand for information and partnerships in the field of civil society and governance assessments which promote social accountability

The forum was originally planned for less than 50 participants, but the demand to participate was overwhelming, with a final participant list of over 150.

2. Created a unique opportunity for like-minded stakeholders from all over Africa to come together for the first time, acquire knowledge, build bridges, and exchange experiences on governance assessments, while showcasing African leadership and innovation in the field

This forum started an important conversation between a multiplicity of stakeholders, at various levels: first, between stakeholders assessing the state of civil society and others assessing the larger governance context; second, between “producers” of governance data (such as the Afrobarometer) and “users” of such data (such as CSOs); and thirdly, between data collectors at the grassroots level and private sector developers supplying technological tools to facilitate the management of data. Important partnerships were forged both at national and regional levels. For instance, several participants who learned (many for the first time) about the Afrobarometer will be drawing from the wealth of readily accessible Africa-specific data it contains, and will approach their national Afrobarometer partner to review and possibly input into the new survey questionnaire being deployed in 2012.
3. Added to the body of knowledge on civil society and governance assessments

In preparation for the forum, UNDP and TrustAfrica commissioned four sub-regional mappings to look at civil society and governance assessment practice from all over Africa. These findings will be published in a development journal and further disseminated through a range of media outlets (newspapers, television, etc.) Moreover, this forum report is envisaged as a synopsis of the multitude of ideas, experiences and knowledge shared among participants over the course of the three days.

4. Strengthened and deepened UNDP’s commitment to work closely with civil society and to support participatory governance assessments in Africa

UNDP has made it a priority to work more closely with civil society in parallel to the support it provides to governments. UNDP co-convened the forum with three CSOs and one African institute, whose contributions, perspectives and networks were key to the success of the event. Furthermore, the Forum reaffirmed that there is a widely felt need to build national capacity for governance assessments, and that the “country-led model” is very appealing. The UNDP Global Programme on Democratic Governance Assessments is strategically positioned to respond to this demand. The next phase of the programme is expected to have a strong focus on Africa, and on strengthening the capacities of CSOs both as “producers” and “users” of governance data.

Summary of key points from presentations & discussions
With 12 highly focused sessions and over 150 participants and panelists, an enormous amount of knowledge, experience and analysis was exchanged during the forum. Staff from sixteen UNDP Country Offices plus representatives from UNDP regional centres, the Oslo Governance Centre and UNDP/ New York contributed their knowledge and expertise to the discussions over the course of the three days.

During the first day, several think tanks shared their expert knowledge and experience. They included the Alliance for Rebuilding Governance in Africa (ARGA), the African Governance Institute (AGI), the Africa Futures Institute, the Institute for Global Dialogue, An African Democracy Institute (Idasa), the South African Institute for International Affairs (SAIIA), Afrobarometer and Africa Governance Monitoring Project (AfriMap); regional institutions (Secretariat of the African Peer Review Mechanism, APRM), and practitioners (Ghana’s APRM Governing Council, African Evaluation Association (AfEA), Gender Links, Group for Alternative Research and Monitoring of the Chad-Cameroon Petroleum Project (GRAMP/TC), and the Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition.

The following are key points emerging from presentations and discussions, grouped according to each day’s theme.

Leveraging the power of partnerships for governance assessments

Rising popular discontent in the face of the global economic downturn and the Arab Spring have exposed the failure of several governments to respond to the needs of their citizens, and in turn, their loss in legitimacy. As the old systems prove not to be working anymore, different modes of governance are emerging, and the relationship between governments and citizens is evolving. Against this backdrop, the forum’s first day examined the emerging role of governance data and multi-stakeholder assessments in shaping civic engagement and in strengthening accountability in 21st-century Africa. Three key messages emerged from the day’s discussions:

On the potential of governance data for strengthening civic engagement

Robust and credible evidence can help civil society gain a place at the policy table and can give greater influence to its contributions to policy processes. In this sense, civil society actors should not be seen merely as data collectors and “watchdogs”, but also as co-producers of public policy.

In the absence of effective democratic institutions and processes at the local level which aggregate the views of citizens, participatory assessments that incorporate the voice of CSOs can serve as a cost-effective proxy for more extensive public participation. In this respect, the Afrobarometer dataset on national public attitudes and experiences on democracy and governance is an underused, readily available means of expressing a collective voice in the policy process.

Externally-driven governance assessments by international institutions have helped to bring governance issues forward, but greater national ownership is necessary for assessments to fulfill their potential as social accountability tools. Homegrown normative frameworks and continental standards and com-
mitments have flourished in recent years, providing a long list of African benchmarks which need to be tracked. Ownership of purpose (“assessing for what?”), ownership of the scope (“assessing what?”) and ownership of methodology (“how to assess?” and “by whom?”) were underlined by many panelists and participants as critical factors of “successful” governance assessments that secure commitment to take recommendations forward.

The use of local, as opposed to external, expertise often determines whether national actors will condemn and reject findings and recommendations, especially if the outcome of an assessment is negative. As such, rather than financing their own external assessments, a more worthwhile investment by development partners would be to develop the capacity of local actors to apply rigorous methods for monitoring governance, and to align their donor reporting systems with national monitoring and evaluation systems, in line with the commitments made in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008).

UNDP and TrustAfrica commissioned a study to map out the ways in which governance assessment practice has evolved in the four sub-regions of Africa (see Box 1 for some reflections from the synthesis report.)

On governance assessments as a means to an end

Assessing governance is not just about collecting data; it is about using it and having an impact on policy decisions. One key consideration, often overlooked by civil society initiators of assessments, is that the design of an assessment should match its intended objective. In other words, civil society needs to better investigate decision-making processes and opportunities for policy influence before even starting to collect data. Data should be supplied at the “right” time and in a practical format for policymakers.

Data consumption in Africa is a major challenge to be overcome: even when the data is available, policy makers do not use it enough because of lack of capacity or because they see assessments as a “policing event”, especially when they are donor-driven. “Civil society must grapple with both sides to assessments: the technocratisation (data, numbers and experts) and the democratisation (people, change, processes).”

Forum participants identified some general factors for successful assessments, based on their experiences: the design of highly tailored instruments in local languages; annual data gathering; a limited number of simple indicators; citizen involvement throughout the process (methodology development, data collection, analysis and advocacy); government’s active participation in the exercise; broad dissemination of information about the process and the results. Importantly, assessments should be made an integral component of domestic political and administrative processes. But none of this will be possible unless we solve the problems – bureaucratic, regulatory and cultural – of access to information. As observed by an AfriMap representative, “We are still archiving 21st-century materials in 19th-century style (…) whereby the government authority asks you to write a letter to request for information that is already available on the IMF website!” Assessments at the local/ district level are often overlooked but have the potential to bring about relatively quick and concrete changes which affect people’s lives, especially in decentralised settings. “The interface between the State and the people is the local level.”
On the potential of multi-stakeholder partnerships for more impactful assessments

To increase space for CSOs to gather and use evidence in policy processes, especially in contexts where political rights may be limited, stronger partnerships between civil society and “like-minded actors”, including progressive policy makers, parliamentarians, national oversight institutions (e.g. anti-corruption commissions), think tanks and the media, even chambers of commerce, can lead to better data and more successful advocacy outcomes.

Well-crafted assessment networks ensure that the data gets into the right hands in the appropriate format. Particular emphasis was placed on the need for civil society to interact more strategically with parliamentarians, given their common interest in making use of assessments for greater oversight. The Pan-African Parliament is a platform particularly important to stimulate the movement “from data to action” given parliamentarians have direct mandates from their constituents to effect legislative reforms. CSOs should also network smarter with the media, which are often utilised as channels of news and information and not necessarily as agents of change and opinion-makers, which they are. There is also a need for greater coordination between CSOs and think tanks, which can facilitate conversations between civil society and government decision-makers.

Instances when CSOs conduct assessments in partnership with government have been making headway in recent years, with the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) as the epitome of this new wave of collaborative assessments. Such assessments promote responsibility for the results from the beginning, and can help ensure action by policy makers, provided that political will at the highest levels is present.

The results are mixed from the fourteen countries which have to date carried out the APRM review, and which are now reporting on implementation of their Programme of Action. It is generally the case that national APRM implementation reports lack civil society voices and views. CSOs struggle to track progress, and to hold governments and APRM National Governing Councils accountable.

For instance, when it came to implementing and monitoring the APRM Programme of Action in South Africa, civil society was absent. It was not clear what role civil society was supposed to play with regards to the official, government-led monitoring process. The South African Institute for International Affairs (SAIIA), in collaboration with the Center for Policy Studies (CPS) and Africa Governance Monitoring Project (AfriMap), therefore launched a complementary civil society-led monitoring effort to track government implementation of APRM recommendations and the overall status of the APRM process. The South African Civil Society APRM Report did not cover all the commitments, but rather focused on documenting a subset of crucial governance issues identified by the consortium of CSOs. A traffic light system (green: issue addressed; yellow: some progress has been made; red: no progress has been made) was used as a means to provide a visual display.

Key recommendations made during the first day could be summarised as follows: if we want civil society to play a stronger role as a participant in the process of assessing governance, and as a user of the evidence for effective policy impact, taking into account the inherent difficulties faced by civil society in African

Box 1. Continental trends in governance assessment: Highlights from a mapping study

• Civil society is becoming smarter at using expanding spaces to work with the State to assess governance, as well as using research expertise and technology to enhance their monitoring work.
• The State is responding to a changing governance environment and is willing to work with civil society, but wants to retain some level of control over these negotiation processes. Reluctance to use externally-imposed assessments forces States to take internal initiatives seriously.
• Community-based groups and marginalised populations are observed in governance assessment but seldom invited to engage in the actual processes. There is space for greater coordination and collaboration amongst the different civil society actors.
• There is a great need for support from international community, but through existing home-grown assessment initiatives and structures rather than new ones.

Siphamandla Zondi,
Director, Institute for Global Dialogue
countries in influencing policy-making, let alone governance policies, we will have to address three main challenges:

1. **Strengthening the capacities of State and non-State actors for the production of reliable, up-to-date and periodic data comparable over time;**
2. **Improving the communication flow between producers and users of governance data, for existing data to be better known and used, and for emerging data needs to be filled more quickly, and;**
3. **Establishing strong coalitions of like-minded actors to advocate for assessments to become integral components of domestic policy-making and oversight processes.**

**Box 2. A successful governance assessment partnership: APRM District Oversight Committees**

**How did the APRM District Oversight Committees (DOCs) come about?**

The APRM National Programme of Action in Ghana specifies roles for civil society engagement in the monitoring of its implementation. These roles are fulfilled by "professional CSOs" based in the national capital, Accra, and in some regional capitals that have the capacity to engage with the central and local governments. This excludes the majority of civil society and community-based organisations (CBOs) at the grassroots level. Having actively contributed to the self-assessment phase of the APRM, CBOs wanted to have a voice in the post-review activities, which led to the formation of DOCs. They are voluntary associations of CBOs who educate their local communities about the APRM and conduct local governance and service delivery assessments using citizen report cards, local expert interviews and focus groups.

**How are the District Governance Reports used?**

Validation workshops for draft local governance reports serve as a platform for citizens to engage institutional directors and service providers about governance issues and service delivery. Once validated, these reports are given to local government representatives who must address citizen concerns. Community radio stations use the findings to engage local authorities and citizens on local development issues. Ongoing discussions are underway to make district governance reports a formal part of local government functioning.

**What role could technology play to improve the DOC assessments?**

Softwares like Datadyne’s EpiSurveyor would address two major challenges: 1) the annual cost of getting the data and analysing over 12,000 surveys from forty districts is $110,000 which restricts the number of participating districts; 2) most DOCs are not computer literate and do data analysis manually. A computerised frequency analysis would resolve persistent reporting delays.

**Samuel Cudjoe, Acting Executive Secretary, Ghana APRM Governing Council**
Scrutinizing the civil society context: Towards new forms of participatory assessments in the African context

The second day of the forum was dedicated to civil society assessments and what they tell us about the current state of civil society in Africa. The sessions looked at the broader issue of civic spaces in Africa, the capabilities of CSOs as agents of reform in governance and lessons learned from participatory civil society assessments on the continent. A dialogue between actors operating at the local, regional and the global level was initiated with an aim to get a clear sense of local needs; create an opportunity to inform global discussion and to unpack the burgeoning landscape of new civil society assessment tools at local levels.

A broad range of stakeholders including think tanks – such as TrustAfrica, CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa), Commonwealth Foundation – and academics contributed their knowledge and expertise to the day’s sessions. CI-VICUS presented reflections and lessons learned from the Civil Society Index (CSI).

With a plethora of voices, there was a rich diversity of perspectives, reminding participants of the heterogeneous nature of civil society. “We have to recognise its diversity, but somehow civil society has become limited to “a sector”, which is wrong! It is not a sector; it is the vibrant social political life of any society.” The term “CSOs” does not equal “NGOs”, and civil society cannot be taken to mean only CSOs. Civil society organizations are but one subset of civil society, which encompasses social movements, the media, community-based associations, religious groups, and a range of informal, spontaneous activity by citizens and communities for the public good. Civil society actors also play different and multiple roles in society e.g. as service providers, advocates, mediators, or contesters, and these roles are overlapping and dynamic according to context, while the issues they address are as disparate as the society itself. This multiplicity of voices and roles creates discord, but is a natural part of a rich and vibrant society, and civil society’s diversity should be recognized as one of its great strengths.

Civic spaces in Africa

Civil society has varying spaces to exist and operate in Africa, as experienced by the forum’s pan-African audience. In some countries, there is a relatively enabling environment which facilitates a minimum of dialogue between citizen and State; while in others civil society must fight incessantly to create [and/or keep] that space [open]. Some stakeholders see the overall situation improving for civil society, while many others see it declining, particularly for certain types of civil society which raise difficult questions towards the State. Civic spaces are always contested to a certain degree given the nature of governance; it is an unending, dynamic process. Power concedes nothing without a fight, and those who benefit from corruption, abuse of power, and secrecy are formidable opponents to civil society actors who want to improve governance.

Over the years, civic spaces have changed from being, for example, locations of social protest which helped
bring most African nations their independence, only to become the enemy in one-party States, to very slowly becoming, at present, an ambiguous partner in a dialogue with government. It is a partnership in need of confidence-building because a great deal of mistrust still exists between civil society actors and government leaders. Several panelists concluded that, ultimately, government can be a better ally than enemy and civil society needs to figure out how to work with the State while not being co-opted by it. Even when massive protest forces out one set of political leaders, others must take their place, and it is at such moments that civil society’s watchdog role becomes most important.

In all African countries, regardless of the degree of openness, the question of legitimacy is always thrown at civil society. There are a number of ways in which civil society actors can respond:

1. Most African governments have reached a point where benchmarks such as the strengthening of public institutions, the separation of powers and human rights are enshrined in laws and supranational protocols. As representatives of the people, civil society has a legitimate space to ensure that these laws are respected and put into practice;

2. The rights to assemble and freedom of speech are fundamental human rights, and civil society is entitled to exercise and uphold these rights, and to help citizens organize and have their voices heard;

3. African governments and many CSOs are both significantly funded by external entities; consequently, the State cannot doubt the legitimacy of civil society solely based on this (as is commonly done).

The issue of legitimacy however remains a valid question to which civil society must respond. To what extent are CSOs, social movements, community associations, etc., rooted in their societies? Do civil society leaders consult the people they represent? Experience has shown that the relationship between CSOs and their constituencies and / or members can be problematic, lacking in transparency, accountability and inclusive decision-making processes. Civil society is often blamed for doing for instead of involving people they are representing, thus reinforcing a culture of passivity and apathy towards public affairs. CSOs need to respond to these critiques, not to become more accountable to the State or to donors, but to become more accountable to citizens. If civil society actors want democratic governments, they have to be democratic organisations and movements themselves. Practitioners at the forum also expressed frustration with short-term projects and funding sources which make it hard to address development challenges in general, and governance issues in particular, because these entail long-term, profound changes in how their respective societies function.

Participants raised the key issue of politicised CSOs whose credibility can be compromised in the eyes of the State, citizens and donors. However, it was also noted that manipulation for political gain is not a phenomenon unique to civil society leaders and organizations. Even when there is no political agenda on the part of civil society, political parties and those in power often accuse CSOs of partisanship. There is often no clear line between social activism and political leadership, and in practice, actors from both sides often cross over, for better and for worse. Questions of transparency, accountability, participation and representativeness are why civil society self-assessments are fundamentally important. It is also important that civil society can assess its strengths, challenges, needs and its potential to add value.

**Participatory civil society assessments**

Africa has been the subject of numerous efforts to map out the organisational terrain and assess the contribution made by civil society to a country’s development. Data sets are provided by the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI), the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, and the USAID NGO Sustainability Index. What do these and other sources tell us about the extent to which civil society – for example, through voice, access to information, and accountability projects – is capable of exerting influence on governance?

On this subject, panelists noted that the main value of civil society assessments lies in the extent to which they strengthen efforts to support citizens and CSOs to hold governments and themselves accountable. By helping to self-diagnose weaknesses, dedicated assessments can help to strengthen civil society and make it a more effective force in building accountable and responsive governance systems. UNDP has a longstanding partnership with CIVICUS on the CSI, through which participatory civil society assessments have been carried out in many countries across the world. The CSI looks at five key areas: civic engagement; level of organisation; practice of values; perception of impact; and the external environment.

The following are a few of the lessons learned from the implementation of the CSI in Morocco, Mozambique and Uganda:
The CSI offered a unique opportunity for dialogue within civil society and proved to be a valuable tool for civil society to come together in different countries (1) to acknowledge and address certain internal weaknesses, (2) to recognise that assessments are an on-going process rather than a one-time event, (3) to inform a limited number of government planning processes, and (4) to gain a much deeper understanding of civil society in that specific country;

The CSI needs to be refined by (1) tailoring it to the national context; (2) having realistic budgets and timeframes; (3) using a broad communication strategy to increase visibility and disseminate findings; and (4) including an action plan to address weaknesses identified in the process;

The latest CSI findings from the international report revealed (1) in spite of public trust in civil society, there is a growing disconnect between established CSOs and citizens engaged in various forms of association; (2) civil society has strong impact in the social sphere but less impact in the political sphere; (3) weak human resources and funding are persistent structural weaknesses for CSOs; (4) collaboration is critically needed and networking is preached by everyone but not well practiced; (5) space for civil society is volatile and relationships between civil society and the State are generally unsatisfactory.

During the forum, CIVICUS representatives shared ideas on the next generation of the CSI and how it will be improved. Highly tailored, rapid assessments with precise objectives linked to intended actions will soon be piloted. A challenge for civil society will be to figure out, in each specific context, how it best can influence government in creating a more enabling environment for civil society and civic engagement. The status of the legal, regulatory and political framework for civil society should be taken into account during a governance assessment.

Box 3. Looking to the future: The Jasmine Revolution and a Civil Society Index - Rapid Assessment (CSI-RA)

Following the Jasmine Revolution, UNDP in Tunisia initiated a project to support civil society in promoting active citizenship. This implies changes in the political, legal and institutional environment framing civil society activities in Tunisia and strengthening the capacities of CSOs to function as democratic and accountable entities.

UNDP has identified the following mid to long-term needs for promoting active citizenship: (1) complete a needs assessment to have a more thorough understanding of Tunisian civil society, (2) reform the regulatory framework governing civil society, (3) strengthen the technical and institutional framework for civil society capacity-building, and (4) invest in democracy education for youth.

Following the Dakar forum, UNDP in Tunisia is in discussions with CIVICUS to implement a pilot project using the newly conceived CSI-RA. The objectives are to: (1) map, convene and build consensus amongst civil society actors in Tunisia; (2) provide CSOs with a flexible, contextualised, inexpensive and easily implemented self-assessment research tool; and (3) contribute to evidence-based civil society strengthening strategies at the country level.

The CSI-RA will generate a vast amount of data about the state of civil society, including a country specific framework and methodology for CSI-RA, a series of questions, indicators and measurement tools to be used for trend analysis, a power analysis map of CSOs internal and external relationships, an in-depth country report of the state of civil society, as well as action-oriented policy briefs and analytical papers.9

Harriet Namisi, Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA)
Towards an enabling environment for civil society: early warning systems

Ongoing monitoring activities suggest that the enabling environment for civil society is shrinking; participants explored ideas about how to detect threats to civic space through an early warning system. After briefly looking at another civil society assessment tool used by the World Bank (see the ARVIN Framework), some participants wondered if it is really possible to anticipate government restrictions by applying a linear assessment method to a highly chaotic and unpredictable situation. Nonetheless, when civil society monitors CSO legislation, legal prosecutions and acts of intimidation, and when it can set indicators and monitor them over time, there are visible warning signs, and preemptive steps can be taken.

Overall, the day’s discussion generated many questions about how to increase the effectiveness of civil society. A key recommendation from the event was therefore to create an online community of practice to continue the discussions. Some of the questions that were raised were the following: How can civil society convince politicians that assessment is not about evaluating government but the whole development process? How can social movements and CSOs work together effectively? How can leadership within civil society be strengthened? How can civil society assessments be applied across diverse entities? How can civil society assessments lead to action? Will donors fund more national/local CSOs? In countries where it is life-threatening to speak out, how can civil society actors protect themselves? How can preventive diplomacy by exercised to defend civil society space? How can civil society make bridges with the private sector which appears to have more power of influence with governments and which can clearly also benefit from less corruption and greater rule of law?

Capacity development was also highlighted as a priority by the practitioners: build capacity to use the data generated from assessments and negotiate for more policy influence; and build advocacy skills to ensure a place at the policy table. It is not about naming and shaming, but being able to change behaviours and institutions.

The relationship between CSOs and donor institutions can be difficult. It should be a mutually beneficial relationship, but the power dynamics are unequal. CSOs are beholden to funders who still want to set agendas, and who miss opportunities to support change because that particular issue is not in current log frames. Civil society activists attending the forum had the opportunity to give UNDP and other donors present some constructive criticism. International donors are needed but should support local, indigenous initiatives and not create new ones; and donors must understand this takes years and extensive capacity-development efforts. CSOs tend to be willing to take risks and need to be courageous while donors tend to be risk-averse; however, international entities sometimes have the space to publicly broach subjects which national civil society cannot without repercussions. Because donor funding is unpredictable, it was suggested that Africans need to develop African philanthropy.

While differences at the country level exist, civil societies in the region nevertheless share common strengths and challenges in moving forward. While civil society has shown increasing strength and relevance in the region, with the CSI research finding the highest levels of community involvement by citizens globally, it nevertheless remains fragile with its continued development and enhanced effectiveness hinging on improvements in the environment in which it operates and its capacity to manage the internal challenges it faces.
Sparking change: Technology and innovation in governance assessments

The final day of the forum focused on technology and innovation in civil society and governance assessments. Panels during this day focused on the value to be added through innovative use of ICTs in three distinct assessment phases: building and managing relations, data collection, and dissemination and mobilisation of data.

Discussions highlighted a number of dramatically different approaches to the use of technology, and the important consequences that traditional communications and socio-political structures have on the value added by such an approach. The rapid development of ICTs and their applications in development contexts have produced a number of novel mechanisms through which technology can support assessment processes, including crowdsourcing citizen reports and decentralised survey management software.

A number of well-established tools for accountability and participation, such as public expenditure tracking surveys, social audits and community scorecards, have also adopted technological elements to enhance efficiency or scope of engagement. The technical and practical advantages promised by technology struck a strong chord with participants, and discussions throughout the day were marked by a powerful optimism and profound curiosity regarding the practical steps involved in applying ICTs to assessment processes.

It was clear from interventions, however, that while ICTs and the types of communication they engender can lower boundaries to citizen participation in governance and accountability processes, technology is no panacea. This point was reinforced repeatedly by panelists, both in terms of large scale transparency and social accountability aims, and also with respect to concrete and methodological applications in assessment processes.

Every instance of ICT deployment described during the day was deeply contextualised in logistical, social and political factors that were largely determinant for initiatives’ relative success or failure. As put by one participant, “a fork doesn’t serve a bowl of soup.” In concrete terms, this presents programming and development practitioners with important considerations when thinking of using ICTs for governance or civil society assessments. These include privacy concerns (both real
and perceived), system stability and security, as well as the compatibility and scalability of software solutions.

Most importantly, panelists agreed that special attention should be paid to questions of voice and access to ICTs, and care be taken not to exacerbate existing inequalities. These inequalities are especially obvious in the context of internet access, despite great strides in recent years, but also exist for mobile phone usage and other, more traditional ICTs. Forum panelists proposed that this issue should itself be a focus of assessment and advocacy (including lobbying for ICT infrastructure, such as high-speed cables, mobile phone transmitters, rural electrification, etc).

Similarly, panelists argued that deployments of technology need to be designed according to a careful analysis of institutional context and the relationships between citizens, service providers, policy makers and other authorities. In this sense, several participants reiterated the mantra that actual technology deployment should constitute only a fraction of the effort and resources in technology-supported projects, with the majority of work taking place “on the ground.” When this analysis and preparatory work takes careful account of the way in which different stakeholders use or do not use specific media (including government officials, civil society and citizens), as well as the incentive structures for doing so, panelists agreed that there was a much greater chance that technology would have an impact for social accountability projects.

The question of ownership was raised during the day’s discussions and panelists posited that the label “Made in Africa” is of little importance to technology users. They do not care where it came from, but are only concerned with whether or not tools work. Ownership is gained through accessibility because technology is global not local, asserted participants. The juxtaposition between highly context-specific governance assessments and borderless, uprooted technologies is an interesting one. In addition, panelists posited that technology is gender neutral, using the example that a phone is a phone and it does not matter if a male or female is dialing. Participants, especially practitioners, tended to disagree and said that technology is gender sensitive because the people who use it, who make it work, do so in gender specific ways. Panelists expressed a desire to better understand how to incorporate a gender perspective into the use of technology in programming.

The potential offered by new technologies was conspicuous in the day’s exchanges. Experiences in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and other countries have demonstrated that ICTs can be used to improve data collection for governance, to structure assessment processes and civic engagement, and make governance assessment data more action-oriented.

The Integrated Social Development Center (ISODEC), based in Ghana, was able to use mapping, databases and multi-media outreach at the local, decentralised level to strengthen governance and bring concrete improvements to people in Asutifi and Birimnorth mining districts. Aiming to reorder local power dynamics and provide citizens with mechanisms to improve public service delivery and impact the distribution of the local mining revenues, data on local revenue and service delivery were collected and made openly available through a combination of digital media, traditional media and in-person communication. This led to the creation of platforms for dialogue, lobbying, conflict resolution, etc. and prompted a dialogue between stakeholders to address the issues.

Social Development Network (SODNET), based in Kenya, is “facilitating effective strategic alliances among interested people and social movements to influence policy-making on issues of social development, in particular on resource management, globalisation and information.” They initiated Ugatuzi, Huduma and launched the Open Budget Initiative in Kenya, which are all designed around web and mobile technologies.

MDGs Nigeria is a Government-sponsored project with various sub-components including one to develop tools for social accountability. They are working on a feedback mechanism that relies on community scorecards and would be complimented by an innovative Nigerian version of Huduma called “I go talk ooo!” using technology (SMS, web and other media) and a multi-partner approach, the idea is to exert pressure on service providers, budget holders and policy makers to ensure the delivery of quality public services, especially to the poor. This feedback loop will not only enrich the work of other stakeholders interested in social accountability (local media, NGOs, donor agencies and possibly legislators) but would contribute to lower level policy articulation. Civil society is involved not just in monitoring, but also in project design.

In an effort to facilitate connections between CSOs and technology designers (for profit and non-profit), seven technologies were invited to host hands-on sessions in which participants could explore the practical potential and implications that technological tools and services hold for their work. This “Live Toolbox” began with a presentation of the tool or service by each technologist, and was followed by working groups in which participants had the opportunity to ask practical questions.
The following table provides a brief description of each of the participating technologies.

### Box 4. Live Toolbox on technological platforms, tools and services

**EpiSurveyor** ([http://www.episurveyor.org/](http://www.episurveyor.org/))

*EpiSurveyor* is a free and open-access technology for designing and conducting surveys with mobile phones. It makes mobile data collection as easy as Gmail with no technical training allows for data visualisation, and it is free to 99 per cent of its users. It greatly reduces the time and costs associated with massive data collection. It has been used extensively by the World Bank to do governance research. It works by entering data on a cell phone on a specifically designed electronic form and then sending that data to a central computer for downloading.

**Frontline SMS** ([http://frontlinesms.com/](http://frontlinesms.com/))

*Frontline SMS* is a free and open software for sending, receiving and managing SMS communications. Users can collect data over large distances at any time of the day. It allows for large scale, instantaneous two-way communication.

**Huduma** ([http://huduma.info/main/](http://huduma.info/main/))

*Huduma* is an open source web platform designed to map and forward citizen reports on service delivery to State officials.

**i-Watch** ([http://www.iwatchlive.org/](http://www.iwatchlive.org/))

*i-Watch* is a web and mobile-based citizen reporting platform for monitoring budgetary allocations and spending, and government performance against promises and plans. It is a crowd-sourcing platform to gather information about the activities (projects and programmes) which governments at all levels promise to embark on.

**Indaba** ([http://getindaba.org/](http://getindaba.org/))

*Indaba* is an online platform for designing and managing scalable and decentralised data collection processes. It is an online platform combining elements of project, relationship and knowledge management. It automates workflows, allowing geographically distributed teams to scale up rapidly, work efficiently, and publish the results in open, sharable formats. Indaba is a software-as-service designed by and for the NGO community.

**MetaLayer** ([http://metalayer.com/](http://metalayer.com/))

*MetaLayer* is a “big data” scraping service for measuring perceptions and sentiments across multiple popular media. It facilitates and streamlines management of huge amounts of disparate data by providing sorting and analytical tools for both real-time and historic information.

**Ushahidi** ([http://ushahidi.com/](http://ushahidi.com/))

*Ushahidi* is an online aggregation and mapping platform for collecting and displaying citizen reports. It crowdsources information received via SMS and the web, and then maps reports for targeted viewers. Ushahidi builds tools for “democratising information, increasing transparency and lowering the barriers for individuals to share their stories.” The platform has been deployed over 12,000 times for disaster relief, election monitoring, citizen journalism to report sexual harassment, medicine outages in health clinics, etc.
The final session of the Dakar forum highlighted the potential of open data and open government online to improve transparency and accountability. Representatives of the Open Government Partnership and the Kenyan Open Data Portal discussed how online transparency and data efforts can support social innovation and stakeholder engagement in Africa, and the importance of grounding such efforts in collaboration between government and civil society actors.

The Kenya Open Data Portal is a progressive government-driven initiative that has been widely heralded as the first of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa. The portal places more than 343 government datasets in the public domain in a variety of downloadable formats, and allows for user customization and interaction with data to create applications and new datasets. This has produced a handful of outputs, including an application crossing data on droughts and livestock deaths to tease out early signs of a possible oncoming drought.

The initiative exemplifies the powerful potential of online data to promote citizen engagement and participatory governance in the continent, and especially the important role to be played by civil society “infomediaries” in communicating open data to stakeholders that do not have access to online media. It also highlights the importance of institutional ownership to provide ongoing and timely data supply, and of a country-led approach in which national civil society supports and validates initiative design, in order to ensure that such open data is sustainable and actionable in the public sphere.

The forum concluded with a reaffirmation of the many ideas heard over the course of three days and agreed on a broad set of recommendations. These are captured in the next section.

4. Recommendations

Samuel Cudjoe, Ghana’s APRM Secretariat
Given the enormous amount of knowledge and ideas shared during the forum, the following are only initial recommendations to continue the momentum while still leaving room for participants to discover other possibilities to apply what was learned about making civil society and governance assessments more effective.

**Recommendation 1**

Create an interactive virtual platform: the “AfriGAP” (African Governance Assessment Platform)

Create an interactive web-based platform to build on the experience-sharing and peer-learning launched at the Dakar forum. UNDP’s Governance Assessment Portal “GAP” could house an online community of practice – the “AfriGAP” – to keep the conversation going, facilitate partnerships with experts and mentorships amongst peers, and provide a one-stop shop on methodologies, assessment reports, news and opportunities in this area. Participants could also use this platform to follow-up on several ideas, such as setting up a network to monitor signs of threats to civic space and devise response schemes on a sub-regional or continental levels.

A quarterly e-bulletin of pertinent issues and ideas can be included.

**Recommendation 2**

Publish mapping results and broadly disseminate the forum report

Publish the African civil society and governance assessment mapping results and/or other collaborative publications in development journals. These mapping results offer a good benchmark for the state of civil society and governance assessments in Africa and indicate areas that need further support from development partners.

Broadly disseminate the forum report as a way to share knowledge and as an advocacy tool to bring attention to the underutilised potential of civil society and governance assessments for increasing accountability and inclusive participation in the continent.

**Recommendation 3**

Pilot rapid civil society assessments

Pilot the next generation of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index as a rapid civil society assessment tool. Make improvements based on feedback from previous users, including the need for country-specific adapted methods, shorter project time frames, more technical assistance, and a design with more actionable results.

Look at possibilities for assessments which can engage government on the question of the civil society enabling environment. Encourage national CSOs who have completed the assessment to train and assist CSOs in other countries while still using country specific methods.
Recommendation 4

Establish a network on preventive diplomacy regarding restrictive civil society legal frameworks

Establish a network with interested participants on preventive diplomacy regarding restrictive civil society legal frameworks, especially in situations where an early warning might change the results.

This would allow people who are on the ground and at the forefront of civil society activities to get important information into the public domain and into the hands of stakeholders who might be able to make a difference.

Recommendation 5

Support post-APRM assessments by civil society in francophone Africa

Building on the two recent pilots in South Africa and Lesotho, support CSOs in the four francophone countries that have completed the APRM – Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Algeria – to monitor the implementation of the APRM National Programme of Action (NPoA) in each one of the four countries, and to assess the the overall status and prominence of the APRM in each country. This initiative would contribute to enhancing public awareness, participation and broad-based ownership of the APRM beyond the Review, and would help to include civil society voices and views in national reports on the implementation of NPoAs.

Recommendation 6

Link civil society assessment data with the next round of UNDP-supported governance assessments

UNDP, through its Global Programme on Democratic Governance Assessments, will be supporting a new round of governance assessments in 2012. Civil society assessment data and findings represent a valuable source of contextual information to consider during the planning stages of a broader governance assessment, notably to identify stakeholders who should be involved, key issues to include in the assessment framework, etc. This would contribute to building a key link between government and civil society in terms of an improved enabling environment for civil society to operate.

Recommendation 7

Explore the possibilities for similar fora in other regions

Explore the possibility of hosting a similar forum to respond to the specific needs of Arab States in 2012 and gauge the interest for issue-focused training and exchange fora in African sub-regions. The results of the governance assessment mappings can help to identify sub-regional issues to be addressed as well as getting stakeholder feedback into planning such fora.
5. Participants’ feedback

See names of speakers on p.28
Thank you for the opportunity of providing us a platform to share some of the challenging work we are doing and further information on other unique work that various partners are implementing in the area of governance assessments in Africa. Participating in the forum has really given us better insights and has provided also very useful information from participant as to how we can improve on the assessments that we are doing.”

Florence Freda Dennis, 
Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition

This is to express my appreciation for the great conference you organized for the African governance fraternity (…). You have initiated an extremely critical process and I hope we will continue to build on what we started.”

[Afrobarometer] hopes to engage stakeholders to work together and ensure that African governments and civil society take full advantage of data and analysis we generate (…). As funder, convener and facilitator of governance discussions and activities, we count on UNDP to facilitate the objective of bringing analysis and insight from data collected to influence major policy discussions on the [African] continent.”

Kathleen Addy, 
Afrobarometer, Center for Democratic Development (CDD) - Ghana

It is not often that we go to a conference and meet an innumerous amount of wonderful people (…). It was a great pleasure to meet you and I am very sure we are to meet again.“

Albertina Mucavele, 
Learning and Training Center for Civil Society (CESC)

This forum, on the very important subject of civil society assessments, has been very enriching. On our side, we intend to distribute documents and recommendations to the civil society organizations [in our country, Cape Verde].“

Januario Nascimento, 
Cape Verde Jewish Heritage Project, Inc.

I have made lots of valuable contacts and particularly enjoyed the presentations on new technologies that could be utilized by civil society.”

Yarik Turianskyi, 
South African Institute of International Affairs
The forum was organized with support from the UNDP-France Trust Fund, with additional support from TrustAfrica and the UNDP Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund.

Several UNDP country offices from the Asian and Arab regions expressed a strong interest in participating in the forum. While some participants came from Egypt, Lao PDR, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia, several additional requests could not be accommodated due to logistical constraints.

Brian Kagoro, Governance Team Leader a.i., UNDP Johannesburg Regional Centre.

Presentation by Jeggan Grey-Johnson, Advocacy and Communications Officer, AfriMAP.

Presentation by Alan Fowler, Independent Development Adviser, University of Kwazulu Natal (South Africa).

Presentation by Yarik Turianskyi, Researcher, South African Institute of International Affairs.

To maintain the non-partisan nature of the APRM in Ghana, DOC members are “non-active political figures”.

Presentation by Alan Fowler, Independent Development Adviser, University of Kwazulu Natal (South Africa).

A Memorandum of Understanding is currently being finalised and a preparatory mission of the CIVICUS team took place in mid-December. The expected completion date is October 2012.

**Names of speakers on p.26**

1. Siphamandla Zondi, Institute for Global Dialogue
2. Maurice Eugueleguele, African Governance Institute
3. Assane Mbaye, Alliance for Rebuilding Governance in Africa
5. Jeggan Grey-Johnson, Afrimap
6. Kathy Addy, Afrobarometer
7. Albertina Mucavele, CESC Mozambique
8. Alice Madeira, UNDP Mozambique
9. Fatou Senghor, Article 19 West Africa
10. Chafika Affaq, UNDP Morocco
11. Alan Fowler, University of Kwazulu Natal, South Africa
12. Kgothatso Serote, International IDEA
13. Sean McDonald, Frontline SMS - Adetunji Bosun, CcHub Nigeria
14. Dadisai Taderera, Global Integrity
6. Evaluation & needs assessment
UNDP solicited feedback from all participants who attended the Africa Forum on Civil Society and Governance Assessments, held in Dakar from November 10 to 12, 2011. UNDP convened the forum with TrustAfrica, CIVICUS, Africa Governance Institute and CONGAD. A short 8-question online survey and in-depth needs assessment were sent to the participants after the event via email. The survey solicited the views of participants regarding logistics, the quality of key events, and the overall usefulness of the Forum. The needs assessment was geared to determine the present and future potential for greater civil society engagement through assessment activities [at the country level], and the usefulness of an online networking platform dedicated to governance and civil society assessments.

Responses were received from 47 participants (37% of all participants) to the online survey and from 32 participants to the needs assessment (25% of all participants), which is within an acceptable margin of responses for this type of survey. The findings will help guide the planning of future similar forums on civil society and governance assessments. In general, respondents gave high marks to the organizers on logistics, thematic sessions, keynote speakers and for the knowledge sharing and networking opportunities at the event, as well as for the overall usefulness of the Forum. They also made useful critiques and specific suggestions on how to improve such a gathering in the future.

Résumé des réponses

Ce forum s’adressait principalement à deux catégories d’acteurs: le PNUD, représentant 38.3 pour cent des personnes interrogées, et la société civile, représentant plus de 25 pour cent. Une gamme plus large de parties prenantes, comme, par exemple, universitaires, entreprises, fonctionnaires, nationaux et diplomates, ont également apporté leur contribution (approximativement 20 pour cent).

De manière générale, 83 pour cent des sondés ont attribué une note au forum allant de bonne à excellente, tandis que 17 pour cent l’ont jugé satisfaisant. Pas une seule personne n’a rapporté que celui-ci n’avait pas répondu à leurs attentes. Près de 96 pour cent ont affirmé que les informations de base, à la fois techniques et logistiques, reçues avant l’événement par l’intermédiaire du site Internet et des bulletins d’information, étaient adéquates et suffisantes.

Graphique 1: Dans l’ensemble, comment jugez-vous ce forum ? A-t-il répondu à vos attentes ?

1 https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/dakarforum
2 https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/needs_english
Les personnes interrogées ont tenu à souligner la qualité des principales interventions et des présentations thématiques (14.9 pour cent), l’opportunité appréciable de renouer avec des homologues venus de tout le continent et de rencontrer de nouveaux partenaires potentiels (34 pour cent), ainsi que l’abondance des connaissances partagées sur des outils spécifiques d’évaluation (44.7 pour cent). D’autres commentaires ont noté les contributions intéressantes/ questions abordées lors des débats, la diversité des recommandations et des techniques de mise en pratique, ainsi que la pertinence des cas d’étude montrant des exemples de bonne pratique.

Trois principaux thèmes ont été soulevés par les personnes interrogées en ce qui concerne de possibles améliorations lors d’un prochain forum :

- Interactivité (45 pour cent) : nécessité de davantage de structures en termes d’espace/ temps pour la mise en réseau, au moyen, par exemple, d’un plus grand nombre de séances interactives (travail en groupe); davantage de temps pour les discussions, par exemple lors de plus longues pauses café ou manifestations parallèles informelles pour favoriser les rencontres; davantage de démonstrations pratiques de l’utilisation des outils d’évaluation;

- Horaires et programme (35 pour cent): nécessité de mieux contrôler les horaires; compte tenu de la consistance des présentations thématiques, le programme donnait l’impression d’être “trop dense” et le niveau d’énergie/concentration a chuté lors de la troisième journée;

- Logistique (15 pour cent): qualité du lieu, ponctualité des navettes d’aéroport, délais et autres problèmes de visas, qualité de l’interprétation entre le français et l’anglais, etc.

Parmi les autres commentaires utiles, on se doit d’ajouter: la nécessité d’une plus grande présence de représentants des communautés locales parmi les participants/ intervenants; le besoin de davantage d’informations concernant les approches pratiques menant aux prochaines étapes concrètes de collaboration; la nécessité d’explorer la possibilité d’organiser un forum dédié exclusivement à l’utilisation des technologies nouvelles et émergentes dans le cadre de l’évaluation de la gouvernance.

“Ce fut une excellente occasion d’échanger des connaissances et expériences avec des représentants éminents de la société civile et des experts de la gouvernance, grâce à une large gamme d’acteurs venus de pays francophones et anglophones.”

“Cette initiative constitue une étape importante vers le renforcement du dialogue national entre le secteur public et la société civile sur les questions de gouvernance.”

“En tant que financeurs, organisateurs et modérateurs de débats et activités liés à la gouvernance, nous comptons sur le PNUD pour aider à atteindre cet objectif d’utiliser l'analyse et les connaissances provenant des informations collectées afin d’influencer d’importants débats politiques sur le continent [africain].”

Graphique 2: Est-ce que vous avez réussi à développer de nouvelles initiatives, collaborations ou partenariats à la suite de ce forum ?
The needs assessment survey further underlined the need for networking activities such as an online platform for sharing information and experience (75%), a collaborative framework for joint planning, joint fundraising and joint activities (68.8%), a common source for news, updates and alerts relating to assessments in Africa (56.3%) as well as regular meetings and trainings to interact with peers in person (43.8%).

As part of the follow-up of the Forum, respondents showed great interest in continuing the work started in Dakar: 97.9% of the respondents were eager to join an ‘Africa Civil Society and Governance Assessments Network’, dedicated to sharing experiences and resources for this type of work.

In addition, 89.1 % of respondents showed great interest in being part of a consultation to determine how such a network would function and what services it would provide. According to respondents, this online networking platform dedicated to governance and civil society assessments would be exceptionally useful to update participants on news and upcoming events (62.5%), as well as to provide with an online library of tools and knowledge resources (56.3%). Other important features included discussion groups on pertinent topics (exceptionally useful for 37.5 %) and the possibility of strategic mentoring (43.8 %).

Thematic areas most relevant to the respondents’ organisations assessment work are the following with an equal number of votes (58%): corruption and integrity, civil society’s enabling environment and civic space, as well as civil society capabilities, accountability and impact. Gender and equality was close behind (55%), followed by justice and human rights (48%), electoral processes (45%), and public service delivery (30%).

When asked to prioritize their needs for further learning and experience-sharing in the following areas, a majority of respondents have put a strong emphasis on the need to identify opportunities for policy influence (86.7%), on using evidence to advocate for change (61%), on mapping existing data sources (52%), on designing participatory methodologies (48%) and on developing coalitions and strategies for stakeholder engagement (48%).

With regards to data availability, the majority of respondents noted that data on civil society and governance was somewhat available in their countries (76% and 70% respectively), but that this was predominantly produced by external actors.

"I learned a lot about governance assessment and its limits and I look forward to seeing the new generation [of tools] and the ways in which calls for ‘context’ and ‘local ownership’ can be implemented”.

"There is a need for a follow-up and the creation of an effective network. You did a great job associating academics to the discussions, but now we need to link the theory to action”.

**Concluding remarks**

When asked for general comments, the majority of respondents expressed their appreciation for the learning and dialogue opportunity afforded by the Africa Forum on Civil Society and Governance Assessments. Many specifically expressed their appreciation to UNDP and the co-conveners for their coordination efforts and assistance during the forum, while others called on UNDP to continue promoting multi-stakeholder engagements at various levels. Finally, several respondents suggested that the interactions experienced during the forum be maintained and deepened after the event, especially at the country level.
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