

Concept Note

Expert Group Meeting on Coordinating Development in Africa

1. Introduction

The development landscape in Africa – at the national, sub-regional and regional levels – is crowded by a multiplicity of actors. These actors include government departments; Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and intergovernmental organizations; major continental organizations such as the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), African Union Commission (AUC) and the African Development Bank (AfDB); United Nations (UN) Funds and Agencies; bilateral and multilateral development partners; the private sector; and civil society organizations.

These organizations interact in a complex manner, employing various strategies, with the view to achieving their respective expected outcomes. However, the results achieved by any organization in such a setting are not only dependent on its own strategies and activities but also on those of other actors in the landscape. Moreover, while most of these organizations have common goals, including Africa's social and economic development, there are potential conflicts of interest at personal and corporate levels that shape the strategies employed and resultant outcomes of activities. Generally, the multiplicity of development actors in Africa has led to duplication of efforts, waste of time and resources, and overall sub-optimal performance. In this context, the following specific problems, among others, have been observed in development efforts in Africa:

- Overlapping and conflicting tasks being undertaken by different organisations;
- Outputs with the same or similar characteristics being delivered by different organisations;
- Failure of organizations to share common inputs for tasks or to use common services such as those available for administrative purposes;
- Failure to take advantage of existing outputs, which may serve as inputs or be prerequisite for other tasks;
- Inadequate sharing of resources; and
- Over-stretched attention and capacities of beneficiary institutions.

These challenges could be addressed through proper coordination. In this note, coordination is viewed from the perspective of managing dependencies among activities of multiple actors. These dependencies include task assignments, and resource sharing. Coordination is therefore about finding alternative processes for performing desired tasks, in a more efficient and cheaper manner. Multiple actors and interactions, resources and goals need to be coordinated if common desired outcomes are to be achieved. In essence, when multiple actors pursue goals together, they have to do things to organize themselves that a single actor pursuing the same goals would not have to do. These extra organizing activities are referred to as coordination (Malone, 1988).

Therefore, the solution to coordination problems, in theory, lies in the actors performing additional activities within the framework of coordination mechanisms. This involves actions such as:

- Translating overall goals to tasks;
- Assigning tasks to groups or individual actors based on principles such as subsidiarity, competitive advantage, quicker and more inclusive decision-making, among others ;
- Allocating resources among different actors in a way that would make maximum impact;
- Sharing information among different actors to help achieve the overall goals; and
- Combining the different knowledge and conflicting preferences of different actors to arrive at overall goals.

In practice, different types of coordination structures have been employed in Africa, including, informal networks, inter-organisational groups or clusters, coordinators, coordinating units, joint Secretariats, lead agencies, among others. However, the stakeholders are constantly seeking to improve the performance of these structures including through the use of lessons learnt from past experiences and latest research findings.

It is in this context that ECA is preparing a report on coordinating development in Africa which aims at critically assessing the development landscape on the continent as well as the performance of mechanisms set up to coordinate the activities of different actors. This meeting is part of the process of preparing the report. The objectives, deliverables, expected outcomes, and participants of the meeting are presented in the remaining part of this note.

2. Objectives

The main objective of the meeting is to review and validate the report on coordinating development in Africa. Specifically, the meeting will provide a platform to:

- Discuss existing theories and cutting edge research on organizational coordination, with emphasis on inter-organisational coordination, and explore their applicability to Africa's development scene;
- Identify, and share experiences and lessons from existing mechanisms to coordinate the work of different development actors in Africa; and
- Formulate recommendations for enhancing the performance of coordination mechanisms in Africa.

The issues discussed and recommendations made would be used in enriching the report.

3. Deliverables

The expected products of the meeting are as follows:

- Outcome document with key recommendations;
- Report of the meeting; and
- Finalised report on coordinating development in Africa.

4. Expected Results

The expected results of the meeting are as follows:

- Better understanding of existing theories and research findings on organizational and inter-organisational coordination and their applicability in coordinating the work of development actors in Africa; and
- Improved performance of mechanisms established to coordinate development efforts in Africa.

5. Participation

The meeting will be attended by representatives of RECs and intergovernmental organizations; major continental organizations including ECA, AUC and AfDB; UN Funds and Agencies; bilateral and multilateral development partners; academic institutions, the private sector and civil society organizations.

6. Date and Venue

The meeting will be held on 5 and 6 July 2011 in the United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC) located at the headquarters of ECA in Addis Ababa.

7. Contacts

For more information about the meeting, please contact:

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