

## **Governance and Operations Document of the Africa Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism**

**December, 2019**

### **Background**

The decision to establish Africa Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (ARCSEM) was reached by members of Major Groups and Other Stakeholders, and civil society organizations in Africa who attended the first Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-1) on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2015 as a way of institutionalizing the engagement of Major Groups, Other Stakeholders and Civil Society Organizations in Africa in Sustainable Development Processes in the region.

An issue paper on Institutionalization of Major Groups, Civil Society and Other Stakeholders was prepared by the Interim Technical Committee in June 2015 and consulted on widely by Major Groups, Other Stakeholders, and Civil Society organizations in the region for four years.

The issue paper considered a number of best practices on institutionalization of major groups, civil society and other stakeholders at both regional and global levels, and recommended institutionalization options for consideration by the membership with the aim of defining an optimal structure and specific functions of the proposed Pan-Africa Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism to facilitate a stronger cross constituency coordination and to ensure that all African voices are equally represented. This was done while recognizing and considering the existing efforts by African civil society organizations to organize and coordinate better and to ensure that the African voices especially the marginalized and excluded are being amplified, and represented in national, regional, continental, and global platforms.

Building on the series of discussions carried out since the first Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and in the subsequent Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development between 2015 and 2019 with: Members of Major Groups, Other Stakeholders, and Civil Society Organizations in Africa; Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism; HLPF MGOS Coordination Mechanism Steering Group; National Sustainable Development Platforms; and UNECA, there is a clear convergence of views on the need for Africa Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism to focus coherently on the Post 2015 Development Framework which includes Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals and other global frameworks adopted by the United Nations, with Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, and the High Level Political Forum as the main regional and global platforms for engagement.

## **Objectives**

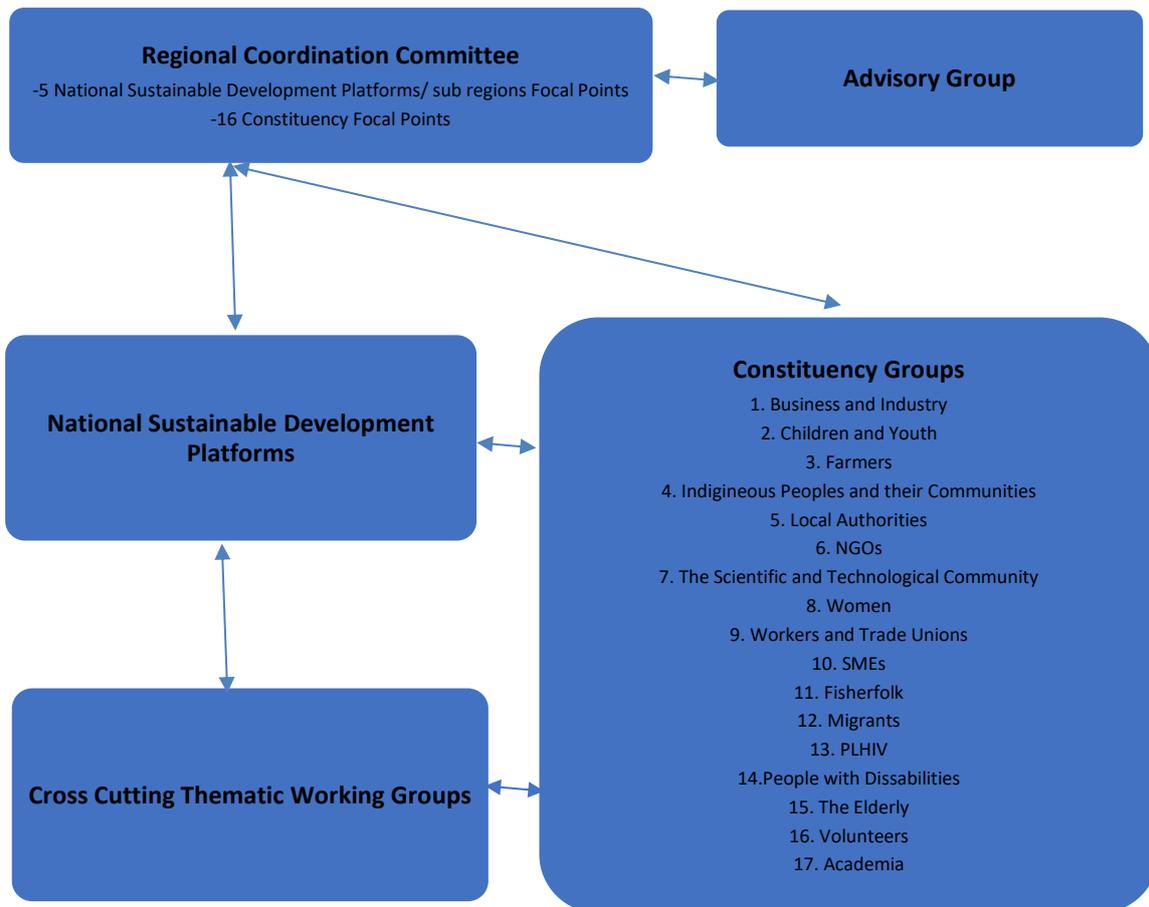
Africa Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism is a self organized and managed mechanism that facilitates African major groups, other stakeholders, and civil society organizations' participation in regional and global United Nations Sustainable Development processes. Through its structure ARCSEM will reach out to civil society organizations in all 54 African countries, sub-regional and thematic networks, major groups, other stakeholder groupings, and key regional constituencies to share information with them on regional and global policy debates and processes on sustainable development, promoting civil society consultations and dialogue, supporting national and regional advocacy and facilitating the participation of a diverse range of CSOs and marginalized groups in regional and global level dialogues and processes on Sustainable Development under the United Nations.

The objectives of the Africa Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism are:

- i. To coordinate and facilitate the coherent engagement of Major Groups, Other Stakeholders ; and Civil Society Organizations in Africa on Sustainable Development and Post 2015 Development Framework Processes at Regional and Global Level;
- ii. To coordinate and facilitate access to and exchange of information, best practices and experiences on sustainable development amongst civil society, Major Groups and Other Stakeholders in Africa;
- iii. To contribute in defining and promoting the African narrative on Sustainable Development at national, regional and global levels.
- iv. Coordinate the contribution of African civil society organizations, Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (both technical and resources) towards the implementation, follow-up and monitoring of Agenda 2030, Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and other sustainable development related processes.
- v. To coordinate and facilitate the development of common positions, statements, and inputs on sustainable development by Major Groups, Other Stakeholders, and Civil Society Organizations in Africa;
- vi. To liaise with: United Nations; UNECA; and UN Funds, Programs and Agencies on the engagement of African Civil Society, Major Groups and Other Stakeholders in Sustainable Development Processes at Regional and Global Level;
- vii. To coordinate and convene a civil society forum as a preparatory event before each African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development;
- viii. To represent and amplify the voice of Major Groups, Other Stakeholders, and Civil Society Organizations in Africa at the HLPF, and MGOS Coordination Mechanism Steering Group;
- ix. To contribute towards transparency and accountability in the implementation of sustainable development in Africa;
- x. To facilitate and coordinate the invitations and accreditation of Major Groups, Other Stakeholders, and Civil Society Organizations in Africa in regional United Nations meetings on Sustainable Development.

## Structure

Africa Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (ARCSEM) is comprised of the Regional Coordination Committee (RCC), Advisory Group, and Membership comprised of National Non-State Actors Sustainable Development Platforms, Major Groups and Other Stakeholders Groupings, and Cross-cutting Thematic Working Groups. At all times the structure has to be balanced in gender and sub-regions represented.



## **ARCSEM Constituents (Members)**

ARCSEM membership is open to civil society organizations and MGoS in Africa. Members are organizations that:

- Agree to the Victoria Falls Declaration, and ARCSEM's Governance and Operations Document
- Submit a profile to the secretariat and self-define the Subregional and Thematic ARCSEM Constituencies they should be placed in. Members may participate in multiple themes and sub-regions (in the case of region-wide organizations). But for voting purposes, each member can belong to only 1 primary Sectoral Constituency and/or 1 Geographic (sub-regional) Constituency.
- Provide a copy of the registration of the organization. In the absence of such, endorsement by at least one existing member of the respective constituency, or a member of another Major Group and Other Stakeholder group will be necessary.

The list of members and their basic information should be available on the ARCSEM website and readily accessible to anyone interested.

ARCSEM Constituents would be asked to regularly renew their affiliation to the ARCSEM by submitting an updated profile to the Secretariat every 2 years.

ARCSEM is open to cooperating with Partners or Allies from civil society, which may include organizations or individuals/resource persons who are not part of the mechanism.

## **Focal Points**

To strengthen accountability, ownership and self-organisation, each sectoral and sub- region (through national sustainable development platforms) will propose, elect (or select by consensus as may be decided by the constituency) their own Focal Point. The Focal Point position is organisational instead of individual, but each organisation should assign one main contact person, and one alternate (alternates may be identified from a different organization if necessary). They should be willing to serve for a term of three (3) years renewable to a maximum of two (2) terms upon re-election.

Note: there will be a handover period of 1 month from the former to the new Regional Coordination Committee.

Criteria for Focal Points:

- 1) Preferably regional and national organisation with working scope in Africa.
- 2) For sectoral constituency focal points, priority will be given to member-based organisations with the majority of their members belonging to the respective sectoral constituency.
- 3) Organisations should have interest, capacity and experiences in coordinating the CSOs in Africa in general, and within their constituencies, particularly in building common positions and facilitating collective decision-making processes.

4) Organisations should have the capacity and commitment to fulfill the responsibilities and task as constituency and sub-regional focal points as mentioned below, each organisation should assign 2 contact people (1 main, and 1 alternate) to coordinate the constituency.

5) The organisation should have an established office or address (called e.g. headquarters/secretariat) with an executive officer. It should have statutes which are transparent and accessible and if a network preferably a democratically adopted constitution.

In addition to the general criteria, constituencies can propose additional criteria, given they are arrived at by consensus within the constituency.

### **The Regional Coordination Committee (RCC)**

All elected focal points will constitute the Regional Coordination Committee which will be collectively responsible for facilitating and coordinating the work of the entire ARCSEM.

The responsibilities of the RCC collectively and the focal points individually are:

1. **Information:** Sharing information on Agenda 2063, Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals processes, and the ARCSEM to CSOs in the region and feeding back information from constituencies to the ARCSEM as a whole.

2. **Outreach:** Inviting CSOs from the various constituencies to engage with Agenda 2063, Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals and related processes through the ARCSEM.

3. **Policy development:** Facilitating process of coming up with common regional, sub-regional and/or constituency positions and recommendations through thematic working groups related to Agenda 2063, Agenda 2030 and sustainable development goals whenever possible.

4. **Engagement:** Facilitating the participation of CSOs in regional, sub-regional and international processes in order to bring regional positions and perspectives related to sustainable development, while ensuring that such engagement is relevant to advocacy, education, organizing, mobilization and/or other related work of members at the national level.

5. **Capacity-building:** Facilitating and supporting CSOs initiatives such as research, education, advocacy, campaigning and skills-sharing for more effective engagement on sustainable development processes.

6. **Test and enrich structures and processes for the ARCSEM:** facilitating the collection and systematization of recommendations from the participants on how to improve the functioning of the ARCSEM.

7. **Resource mobilization:** Raising funds for all of the above and ensuring transparency and accountability to the constituencies.

### **Advisory Group**

An Advisory Group (AG) consisting of individuals that have extensive knowledge on sustainable development and civil society engagement supports the work of the RCC. Individuals recommended on the basis of their expertise by the Co-Chairs and/or members of RCC and subject to confirmation by a consensus of the RCC will constitute it. The AG's role is to contribute to the full realization of the

aims and vision of the ARCSEM. They shall provide timely advice and assistance to the RCC as requested by the Co-Chairs. They may be invited to deliberations but are not part of the decision making of the RCC. The number of AG shall not exceed 25% of the number of the RCC. Necessity and composition of AG is subject to periodic review by the RCC.

### **Thematic Working Groups**

Thematic Working Groups are ad hoc cross-cutting groups of constituents that come together temporarily to work on a specific issue or prepare for a meeting or specific engagements. They are initiated by posting a thematic concept on the ARCSEM and a member is assigned as a coordinator, who reports to the RCC and makes it available online in the same fashion as regular reporting. The role of the TWGs is to develop regional common positions and/or messages for regional and global sustainable development processes on specific themes. It will be composed of volunteers from the various sub-regions, constituency groups and experts. Membership in them is voluntary and based on expertise or interest, rather than representation. A working group may be formed around a theme proposed by any member of the ARCSEM if:

- (1) the topic is related to sustainable development; and
- (2) at least 5 member-organizations from at least 5 sectoral constituencies commit to work together on the theme.

### **Functional Working Groups**

Functional working groups can also be formed to perform particular tasks necessary for the effective and efficient operations of the ARCSEM such as communications, etc.

### **Co-Chairs of the ARCSEM**

Three (3) Co-Chairs (one representing the sub-regions, one representing Major Groups, and representing Other Stakeholders) will provide leadership for ARCSEM. The RCC members will nominate from amongst themselves (self-nominations allowed) and consensus must be reached within the RCC.

The Co-Chairs shall convene meetings of the RCC, prepare reports of the RCC to the ARCSEM membership, and represent the ARCSEM in liaising with external agencies.

The Co-Chairs may decide to have a division of labor amongst themselves (e.g. one can focus on sub-regions; another on sectoral constituencies; another on thematic working groups)

## **OPERATIONS OF THE ARCSEM**

### **Election of Focal Points**

1. Before the start of an election process an election committee will be created to oversee the process and deal with possible problems. This committee will be composed of three members of the AG who are not nominated for any position, did not nominate anyone, and waives his/her right to vote in the election.
2. This elections committee will draw up the official list of all Constituents based on the online database. Only those included in this list may nominate and/or be nominated as Focal Point and can vote.
3. One can only nominate or self-nominate and eventually vote within his/her main sector and sub-region listed in the database. i.e if you are listed as farmers, you can only nominate farmer constituency focal point, and NOT women focal points.
4. Nominees would have to confirm their acceptance of the nomination before elections. Organizations that are nominated to more than one Constituency would have to choose only one, either sectoral or sub-regional constituency. Self-nominees need endorsement by at least one other organization from the same constituency.
5. The elections committee will review the eligibility of each nominee based on the stated criteria for Focal Points above.
6. The elections committee shall circulate the official list of eligible nominees to all ARCSEM constituents and solicit nominations and self-nominations from ARCSEM Constituents for Focal Point and Alternate (if so decided by the Constituency) based on the Criteria above.
7. Elections will be done online to give a chance to all members of ARCSEM to vote.
8. A RCC member should ideally take a break before being nominated again, although this can be flexible for smaller Constituencies.
9. Nominees must win at least 20% of eligible voters from his/her sectoral or sub- regional constituency in order to win and be confirmed as Focal Point. If no nominee gathers more than this threshold, then nominations will be extended for that sector or sub-region as the case may be.
10. In case an elected Focal Point decides to step down from this post, he or she is requested to give 1 month's notice of resignation so that there is sufficient time to elect a replacement and a handover can be properly arranged.

### **Outreach**

Constituency and Subregional RCC Focal Points should complement and add to each other's lists in the mapping tool to ensure full coverage. More should be done to ensure outreach to underrepresented geographical and marginalized groups. Outreach lists will be shared via Google Drive and a shared database.

## **Meetings**

The ARCSEM will aim to have regular conferences back-to-back with the ARFSD and other regional meetings under UNECA with interest to ARCSEM. The RCC shall aim to meet face-to-face at least twice yearly and electronically at least once bi-monthly. The AG will be invited to join these meetings of the RCC. The sectoral groups and sub-regional groups shall also strive to meet face-to-face at least once before the next ARFSD and as often as necessary by teleconference.

## **Decision Making**

Decisions of the ARCSEM will be made through systematic consultation of the focal points with their respective constituencies. Consensus by quorum is the preferred method of decision-making within ARCSEM as well as internally to the RCC. Divergent positions will be duly noted and reported.

Process for Decision-Making:

1. In meetings, a 50%+1 Quorum is needed in the RCC for discussions. By email a 2/3 Quorum is needed.
2. The Quorum will first try to reach consensus. A time limit will be set.
3. If consensus is not reached, a vote will take place. A time limit will be set.
4. Those who do not answer within the time limit, agree to not participate. (NOTE: If the Focal Point does not or cannot vote, the Alternate can be contacted.)
5. Once decisions are cleared by the RCC, they will be sent to the broader ARCSEM Constituents, where Focal Points are responsible for encouraging Constituents to respond.
6. For significant decisions, groups must be encouraged to participate (NOTE: The process for significant decisions needs to be further developed). For statements, Constituents should be clear that their silence equals agreement.

## **Sign-off**

The RCC will approve sign-offs to statements and other documents that will be released in the name of the ARCSEM after consultation with their constituencies/sub-regions. Statements and other documents may be released in the name of the constituencies/sub-regions under the concerned group's consensus and with due notice to the ARCSEM members.

## **External Liaison**

The Co-Chairs of the ARCSEM, will be responsible for coordinating with UNECA, UN Agencies, Programs and Funds, and Regional Coordination Mechanisms (RCM), its member agencies, HLPF MGOS Coordination Mechanism Steering Group, and other agencies external to the ARCSEM on matters relating to ARCSEM.

## **Representation**

ARCSEM needs to appoint people to represent the mechanism at various events and fora, either as speakers or simply as attendees. At times there may also be a need for people to represent ARCSEM to the media or in other external relations.

The selection process is as follows:

1. ARCSEM Constituents will be emailed and asked for nominations or self- nominations.
2. Criteria will be given, depending on the event (NOTE: 'expertise' includes grassroots experience not just technical, professional or academic credentials; should take gender and sub regional representation into account; and should ensure that representatives are able to speak about a broad range of issues)
3. The RCC will make a decision based on the criteria. (NOTE: This selection system must be tested in the next 6 months and reviewed.) If the representation needed is clearly Constituency-based, then Constituencies will make a decision.

Further

- Language may be considered.
- Representatives may be external to ARCSEM.
- Representatives chosen need to clearly state that they are representing ARCSEM.
- When slots for participation/attendance at meetings are being considered (vs. speaking opportunities), the criteria will be less strict.
- Individuals selected to participate in international activities to represent the ARCSEM will be required to report back to the ARCSEM how the regional positions and perspectives were delivered and the results of her/his participation within two weeks after the event.

## **Finance**

The ARCSEM will seek to operate primarily on the basis of self-reliance to avoid undue dependence on external donors. Nevertheless, the ARCSEM shall do its best to access funding and other forms of material and political support for the operations of the mechanism. Funds may be sought for assemblies, forums, constituency meetings, translations, national level work, grassroots mobilizations, giving money to grassroots movements, etc. A Working Group on Fundraising may be formed for this purpose. Individual or joint fundraising initiatives can also be undertaken by any member of the RCC to support the work of their own constituency/sub-region.

In the absence of an ARCSEM Secretariat, MOUs need to be developed between ARCSEM and the organization(s) through which donors fund ARCSEM ('host organization'). ARCSEM can also form a structure for accounting and bookkeeping while the host organization would lend legal structures and registration in a country.

Modalities for host organization need to be developed and agreed by the RCC.

## **Accountability**

The RCC will be accountable to all constituents of the ARCSEM and Individual Focal Points are accountable to their respective sectoral and sub-regional constituencies. Each Focal Point will be required to write reports on how they are facilitating the outreach and participation of their constituencies /sub-region. On this basis the RCC will release a report every year (before the annual conference) that will detail the ARCSEM activities and recommendations for ways forward. The general membership will be able to feedback on the performance of individual focal points and the RCC. The ARCSEM email listserv and website will be used to facilitate communications.

In case of disputes that cannot be settled within the RCC, an ad-hoc committee will be formed to solve them amicably. In case Focal Points are deemed inactive for more than 2 months without adequate explanation, steps will be taken to ensure that the problem is solved.