



CHARTER OF THE AFRICAN COUNCIL OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

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FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE**

The global voice for the African civil society

THE CHARTER OF THE AFRICAN COUNCIL OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

Mission

1. The African Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (AFRONGO) was formed in 2015, primarily for this purpose: To create a broad based pan-African body for NGOs across the continent to come together in pursuit of collective agendas and to engage with governments and other actors in Africa's regional sustainable peace and development processes. The Council's primary role is to enhance the performance of its members and their ability to deliver high-impact, cost-effective, and innovative programmes for the promotion of environmentally sound, equitable and sustainable socioeconomic development in their respective communities.
2. AFRONGO shall be an umbrella organisation for NGOs operating in Africa. The Council was formed by a group of NGOs out of their concern to avoid duplication of NGO efforts, and to minimise conflict and competition between NGOs. The founders were also interested in ensuring maximum use of resources mobilised by NGOs for peace, relief and social development purposes through collaboration, networking, and mutual reinforcement of each other's activities.
3. The Council is made up of the NGO Members' Assembly, a Board of Directors elected every year by the NGO body and an office. The latter serves as a link between AFRONGO Board and NGOs and governments, donors, and the public, and allows the dissemination of information on NGO activities through a quarterly newsletter to members and the public at large.
4. The Council and its members work towards sustainable peace and human development, human rights promotion and protection, good governance, environmental sustainability, the reduction of poverty and the fight against HIV/AIDS geared to the improvement in the standards of living of the poor and marginalised members in African communities.

Objectives

5. The Council provides the opportunity for NGOs to meet regularly and periodically to discuss issues that are of relevance to Africa regional and national NGO communities, exchange ideas, and share information about their respective activities, achievements, difficulties, and promote NGO solidarity for the benefit of the communities they work with.
6. NGOs meet regularly at the Council's office and events where sectoral and thematic taskforces have been constituted to allow NGOs to discuss, exchange information and field experiences. By collaborating with its core members, the Council aims as part of its strategic direction, is to strengthen the capacity of its member organisations in strategic planning and strongly advocate for a vigorous fight against poverty, promote sustainable peace, human rights, democratic governance, and address environmental ills and social injustices at all levels of our society.

Primary Obligation

7. The Council's primary obligation is to promote and enhance NGO operations through capacity building, and serve as the mouthpiece and advocate on behalf of NGOs operating in Africa, in which respect the Council assists NGOs to serve communities better.

Principles

8. The Council shall be a scrupulously independent, voluntary, non-partisan organisation of national, regional and international NGOs participating in their official capacity, free of any governmental or political alignments, and limiting its activities to its civic activism and development mission, principles, partnerships and programmatic objectives throughout Africa.
9. The Council's governing principles are also in accord with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms the rights of all to freely "receive information" and "express and disseminate opinions." A vibrant, diverse, and economically sustainable African civil society and non-profit sector is an essential platform and guarantor for those rights.
10. The Council community further holds that:
 - a) The growth and development of Africa's independent civil society is primarily the responsibility of all development actors and civil society professionals themselves – NGOs, faith-based organisations, educators, and support organisations.
 - b) Collaboration rather than competition among regional and national civil society organisations and development actors is a prerequisite for analysing and resolving Africa's socioeconomic problems.
 - c) The African civil society can and must play a fundamental role in national, regional and global economic and social development.
 - d) Civil society institutions have the responsibility and the ability to make local societies more democratic, better informed, and more responsive to the needs of all citizens.
 - e) A pluralistic, independent, self-sustaining civil society and non-profit sector is an essential guarantor of freedom of expression, effective and democratic governance, and sustainable human development.
 - f) International development financing – in addition to private capital resources – is required for the sustainability of the non-profit sector in Africa, as it is in other socially and economically essential areas of the non-profit sector around the world.
 - g) Consultations with governmental and inter-governmental institutions must be vigorously pursued to secure effective civil society participation in the formulation of socioeconomic-related policies and laws.

Civil Society Context and Partnerships

11. The Council's approach to "civil society development" embraces the full gamut of assistance aimed at the sector's independence and sustainability, including reforms of governments' non-profit/civil society policies and regulatory systems; the strengthening of civic education and professionalism; public and private financial assistance; and capacity-building for NGO management and programme planning.
12. The Council's goals and proposals are informed by a shared analysis of the problems and prospects that affect the development of civil society institutions across the continent.

13. These trends present new opportunities and challenges for the African civil society, calling for strategically robust and coordinated intervention by civil society development professionals and institutions. It is critical to find a common voice and platform for articulating and responding to these globalisation-driven certainties and uncertainties, in order to ensure the sustainability of a non-profit sector that will contribute to good governance and human development in Africa.
14. The Council recognises and addresses the many key challenges that face regional, sub-regional and national civil society organisations, including but not restricted to:
 - a) Sustainable growth models for NGOs;
 - b) A paucity of leadership and organisation-managerial skills;
 - c) Technological change and innovation in the field;
 - d) The imperative to produce compelling, independent reporting for development and civic participation; and
 - e) Access to needed civil society support services, such as market research tools, training programs and capital investment mechanisms.
15. The Council will work in partnership with established national, regional and global civil society organisations and development actors, seeking to support and complement but not replicate their ongoing efforts in the field. These include but are not limited to:
 - a) CIVICUS
 - b) International Centre for Non-Profit Law
 - c) World Association of Non-Governmental Organisations, etc., etc.
16. The Council acknowledges that intergovernmental institutions can play an important role in civil society policies and in the economics environment for independent African civil society. The Council is thus committed to fostering an effective and healthy dialogue with partners of national governments – as a collective – through such intergovernmental organisations as:
 - a) UNDP – United National Development Programme
 - b) UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund
 - c) UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund
 - d) UNHCR – UN High Commissioner for Refugees
 - e) WHO – United Nations World Health Organisation
 - f) EU – European Union
 - g) AUC – African Union Commission
 - h) WBG – World Bank Group
 - i) Etc., etc.
17. Aside from these important intergovernmental organisations, there are scores of international, regional and country-based initiatives that run the gamut from the defence of civil society freedom to the encouragement of citizen participation. To this end, the Council will seek strategic partnerships with national, regional, and global civil society development bodies as a

way of identifying and changing state policies and laws that constrain the sustainable growth of national and local civil society institutions across Africa.

Programme Objectives

18. Guided by continual analysis of the national, regional and global civil society environment and in keeping with its agreed principles, the main objects of the Council are:
- a) To create a broad based pan-African body for NGOs across Africa to come together in pursuit of collective agendas and to engage with governments and other actors in the regional peace and sustainable development processes;
 - b) To foster a vibrant, sustainable, independent African civil society platform that supports regional and global progress towards an open society;
 - c) To promote the development of pluralistic civil society channel as a key information and accountability mechanism for democratic development Africa-wide;
 - d) To enhance the performance of its members and their ability to deliver high-impact, cost-effective, and innovative programmes for the promotion of environmentally sound, equitable and sustainable socioeconomic development across Africa.
19. The specific programmatic objectives of the Council are to:
- a) To foster thought leadership and information among the African NGO community and the critical issues facing it, and for the production of high quality research and information essential in strengthening the sector;
 - b) To build leadership, management and professional capacity to enhance the quality, ethics and overall professionalism of NGOs around Africa, with a specific focus on gaps in planning, management, programming, funding raising and technical skills;
 - c) To facilitate the establishment of best practices in NGO corporate governance, advocacy, training, resource use, safety and security;
 - d) To assist members with fundraising, advocacy, strategy mapping, marketing and promotions;
 - e) To be the repository of data and its analysis focusing on key issues in the Africa regional and national civil society communities;
 - f) To actively contribute in human capital development through offering members capacity building, continuing education, training and learning opportunities;
 - g) To support the improvement of the legal and policy environment for independent civil society, including needed reforms of national NGO/civil society laws and broader freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and access to information policies;
 - h) To raise, mobilize and disburse funds and other resources for the promotion of the objects of the Council;

- i) To design, organise and conduct suitable training and educational programs, courses, seminars, study groups, workshops and other activities for individuals and groups;
- j) To provide a mechanism for cooperation among key national, regional and international civil society and development bodies, among others.

Membership Composition

- 20. The Council's members are national, sub-regional, regional and international NGOs working with communities in different sectors, mainly in rural areas of the continent. The Council's members play key roles in areas such as health, education, environmental protection, human rights, peace building, good governance, water, sanitation and hygiene, youth development, child protection, rule of law, women's empowerment, agriculture and credit, as well as small enterprise development projects such as vegetable gardening, food processing and similar activities.
- 20. The Council strives to support the diversity of approaches and activities of members.

Governance, Communication and Accountability

- 21. The Council shall be governed by a board of directors of the non-profit sector who are NGO executives, development practitioners, civic actors, and other experts in global, regional and national civil society issues. Board members shall together represent a broad spectrum of professional expertise, and collectively reflect the national, regional and global linguistic and cultural diversity of the Council. The Board shall be guided by the mission, values and objectives set out in this Charter.
- 22. The Council is registered as a not-for-profit organization in the Republic of Sierra Leone. Its projects and staff are managed by the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) based in Freetown and reporting to the Board; The Council's projects and personnel may also be based elsewhere in Africa or worldwide as needs arise.
- 23. The Council shall be authorized to receive funding and other support from government and intergovernmental sources, as well as corporate, philanthropy and other partners with a commitment to regional civil society and development in accord with the Council's principles.
- 24. While governments and partners shall have no role in the Council's governance, the President/Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Board of Trustees shall keep donors and other partners informed of the Council's major strategic and implementation issues and activities.
- 25. The Council is committed to the principles of transparency and accountability, and shall provide full disclosure of its programmes, activities, positions, funding sources and governing statutes through its website, publications and other platforms.
- 26. The working languages of the Council shall be English; where feasible, all Communication and documentation shall be provided in Spanish, Portuguese, French, Arabic, and English languages. This does not preclude the possibility of using other languages for the official business of the Council.