

Statement of African civil society organizations at the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Africa Regional Meeting in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on 19 May 2015

African civil society organizations (CSOs) of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) consider the following issues to be important and timely for consideration and action by the OGP Co-Chairs, Steering Committee and African participating countries:

The protection, promotion and consolidation of civic space in Africa

We note a disturbing trend towards the closing of civic space in Africa, including restrictions on basic freedoms, access to information and the overall enabling environment for civil society, and we are concerned about the implications of the closing of civic space on meaningful government-civil society engagement. OGP participating countries have a responsibility to uphold the values and principles of the OGP, as per the Open Government Declaration. As such, we call on:

- Governments of OGP participating countries to establish and ensure the implementation of laws that recognize and protect freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, freedom of information, freedom of the press, whistleblower protection and remove unwarranted restrictions and controls on civil society organizations including the repeal of secrecy laws.
- Civil society organizations and networks in African OGP participating countries to broaden, widen and deepen awareness of the OGP among citizens, and claim their legitimate space in decision making at the national, regional and global level.
- Civil society organizations to hold ourselves to the same standards we demand of our governments, by being open, transparent and accountable about our own activities and operations.
- Governments of Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and Ghana to adopt comprehensive access to information laws that would empower their citizens and help them understand government better.
- Governments of South Africa, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Tunisia to fulfil the promise of their access to information laws by ensuring that they are implemented and enforced.
- The Government of Tanzania to rapidly revisit recent legislation on Statistics, Cybercrime, Access to Information and Media Services, to ensure that space for open public debate, including room for dissenting voices, is robustly protected.
- Governments of African OGP participating countries to call for Burundi to uphold democratic principles, respect the Arusha Peace Accords, and to restore law and order to ensure security to of all citizens.

Support for the formulation of the Post-2015 agenda that incorporates good governance as a sustainable development goal

Believing that the principles and mechanisms of the OGP can be an important tool to promote national implementation of commitments to development in the future Post-2015 Development Agenda, we call on:

- OGP participating countries to support the inclusion of the robust and effective targets related to transparency, accountability and access to justice in Goal 16 in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.
- OGP participating and non-participating countries to institute fiscal transparency legislation and institutional frameworks, and to promote and strengthen independent institutions and agencies of

government responsible for preventing illicit financial flows and recovery of stolen assets, enabling countries finance the realization of their development goals.

- African governments to develop an accountability framework for the post 2015 development agenda that is bottom up and people-centred, and that guarantees citizen access to timely, useful and reliable information to monitor progress in the attainment of the Post-2015 goals.
- Civil society networks in the region to promote Goal 16 during this crucial year of negotiations.

Robust leadership by South Africa as co-chair of OGP in supporting improved government-civil society engagement and OGP governments' compliance with OGP's values

Recognizing the critical position of South Africa in the region, and its important leadership role in OGP, we call on South Africa to:

- Promote and protect OGP values of transparency, accountability and citizen participation both within its borders and in other African participating countries through bilateral and multilateral outreach.
- Promote and encourage principles of participation, transparency and accountability in the extractive sector to enable citizens to hold governments and companies to account for the use of public resources, driving improvements in service delivery and accelerating progress towards the eradication of extreme poverty, including on fiscal transparency, contract transparency, beneficial ownership and open data.
- Promote, strengthen and support sustained and meaningful dialogue between governments, civil society and citizens, through outreach, peer exchange and learning.
- Encourage and support, through outreach, peer exchange and learning, eligible non-participating African countries to join the OGP.
- Encourage and support non-eligible African countries to advance reforms to meet the eligibility criteria of the OGP through outreach, peer exchange and learning.

The establishment and maintenance of a government-civil society participation mechanism for consultation in the development, implementation and monitoring of OGP commitments

OGP is about partnership in pushing for open government reform through country level mechanisms. Poor quality of participation in OGP processes at country level has resulted in the low impact of country commitments. We believe that future improvement of OGP in terms of partnership can be achieved if all stakeholders are committed to true partnership in the spirit of OGP. We therefore call on:

- OGP participating countries to ensure that their commitments are specific, strong, and enable deeper transparency at the national and sub-national levels; set clear outcome indicators agreed by government and civil society for each commitment and ensure the sustainability of those commitments.
- OGP participating countries to set standards of governance at the national level, creating a platform in which there is equal representation from government and civil society. Non-involvement of civil society in making and implementing country commitments should be considered a violation of OGP values.
- The OGP Steering Committee to take a holistic approach on country compliance, taking into account both the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) and other independent reports.

Participants of the OGP Africa Civil Society Day