

EAC STAKEHOLDERS WORKSHOP ON STRENGTHENING THE PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN REGIONAL TRADE-RELATED PROCESSES

CONCEPT NOTE

The East African Community (EAC) Treaty and the East African Cooperation Development Strategy take cognisance of the fact that the process of economic and social integration is complex and its attainment depends on the collective efforts of its Member States, civil society as well as the individual peoples of East Africa. The East African Treaty in particular addresses the participation of *Non-State Actors*, and the five partner states agreed to provide an enabling environment for the Private Sector and Civil Society to participate and undertake to formulate strategies to promote continuous dialogue at national and community level to help create an improved business environment for the implementation of agreed decisions in all economic sectors¹.

The EAC is growing fast with the formation of the East African Customs Union, the enlargement of the Community with the admission of Rwanda and Burundi, the ongoing negotiations of the East African Common Market as well as the consultations on fast tracking the process towards East African Federation.

Equally important, was the recognition of promoting and articulating the interests of the EAC as a bloc in trade negotiations. In 2002, a commitment was made by the EAC Partner States to act collectively in global trade issues and this commitment has now been rendered more urgent by the EU-ACP structures as regards the negotiations of EPAs and the fulfilment of WTO requirements. The five EAC member states have since November 2007 reconfigured as a negotiating block and initialled a framework Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union (EU) with further commitments to conclude a comprehensive EPA by July 2009.

However the progress that has been achieved so far in the EAC regional integration process especially in trade related negotiations i.e. Common Market has come with restricted participation of *Non-State Actors* despite specific provisions for the participation of *Non State Actors* in the regional integration process.

The wider Civil Society has not been fully recognised as one of the formal structures and consequently has not ardently participated in these crucial processes.

The handful of NGOs that have engaged in this process have lacked comprehensible co-operation and networking thus their participation has been *ad hoc* and largely outside the established formal structures of the EAC. This has led to disjointed efforts, inconsistency in representation at negotiating fora and therefore limited impact in addressing pertinent issues in the regional integration process.

¹ Article 127, The treaty for the establishment of the East African Community

In addition, there has been limited consultation of the people in East Africa as regards the direction of these critical processes. This has been compounded by the fact that information as regards the EAC regional integration processes, analysis of its implications is still limited to a few institutions and individuals at the national and regional level. The resultant effect of this situation has been the lack of adequate consultation among the people of East Africa and consequently the needs and aspirations of the people to how it affects their communities has inadequately been factored into the regional integration processes.

In view of the above, Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI) is convening a two day regional workshop to take place on the 17th and 18th November 2008 at Hotel Africana Kampala, Uganda to support efforts of strengthening the participation of civil society in trade related regional integration processes to ensure that they take into account the needs and aspirations of the people and the strategic interests of the East African region.

Objectives of the workshop

1. To evaluate structures created for Non-State Actors' participation in the treaty establishing the EAC.
2. To assess the nature and level of participation of Civil Society Organisation in the EAC integration process.
3. To assess the progress made thus far in the regional integration process especially in the EPA, WTO, Common Market Negotiations and the recent COMESA, SADC and EAC Free Trade Agreement.
4. To make proposals on how CSOs can effectively participate and influence regional integration processes.
5. To mobilise and strengthen existing networks of CSOs that are working in the area of trade and regional integration so as to effectively co-ordinate CSO efforts in this Integration process.

Expected Outcomes

1. Higher awareness levels among civil society and other stakeholders on the on-going trade related processes in the East African Community.
2. Create synergies with the East African Community Secretariat, EAC ministries at country level and its agencies.
3. Build a network/coalition of CSOs in the EAC region to effectively participate and influence Regional Integration processes.
4. Develop a clear strategy of how CSOs working on trade in the East Africa region can engage trade related regional Integration processes..

Participants

1. CSOs working on trade in the EAC region.
2. EAC secretariat
3. Trade negotiators
4. Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Industry
5. The Ministry of East African Community Affairs
6. The Private Sector and the media.