

The Yaoundé Declaration 2005

**The role of community development in
building civil society in Africa**

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2005

The role of community development in building civil society in Africa

Preamble

Almost 400 delegates from across Africa and beyond, met in Yaoundé on the occasion of the 2005 biennial conference of the International Association for Community Development,¹ organised with the cooperation of the government of Cameroon. The conference addressed the theme of '*Building civil society through community development*'. Throughout the five days of the conference, and in eighteen workshops, delegates from a wide range of community development backgrounds formulated a series of issues relating to the role of community development in building civil society in Africa. Supported by a further 150 corresponding delegates from African countries who had been involved in the planning of the conference and who were consulted on the draft of this statement, the text below represents the final agreed declaration which the IACD was asked to forward to the African Union and through it, to national government Ministries and to regional bodies concerned with the role of community development in Africa. A total of 25 African countries – from east, west, north, south and central Africa - were represented in these deliberations and planning. Delegates also committed themselves to use this statement as a basis for enhancing the role of community development at local, provincial, national and regional levels within Africa

Community development is a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policy and action. It seeks the empowerment of local communities. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their communities, organisations and networks on the one hand, and the capacity of institutions and agencies (public, private and NGO) on the other to work in dialogue with citizens to shape and determine change in their communities. It plays a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. Its core values are concerned with human rights, social inclusion, equality and respect for diversity. It has a specific skills and knowledge base. The practice of community development in Africa must also however reflect and respect the African experience and culture – for example the existence of strong family, tribal and community roots. This requires both an African understanding of the meaning of 'development' at a community level but one which recognises and respects basic human rights for all. It also requires recognition that rapid urbanisation in the continent has placed great strains on both urban and rural communities and that rural development policies should be strengthened with a view to slowing the rate of movement from rural to urban areas.

The conference asserted that solutions to Africa's problems must lie firmly and democratically in the hands of the African people themselves. Just as the countries of the North, through political and economic colonialism and imperialism, created the conditions under which the countries of Africa have suffered for many years, these same countries must accept that they should now – where requested by the peoples of African countries - support the creation of the conditions for

sustainable development in the South. This is where the role of community development can be significant. Democracy is not simply about a few people elected every few years making decisions for the rest of the community. It is about a living participatory democracy where local communities, groups and organisations can think about their own needs, develop their own programmes for change and influence the policy process to respond to these needs. Community development work is critical in helping to make this happen, in strengthening an autonomous civil society to promote participatory democratic life within African countries. All now agree that good governance is one key to African development; and African civil society must be allowed to flourish to ensure that the conditions are right for this to happen.

The necessary conditions for this to happen include:

- The provision of basic needs (potable water, food security, education, sanitation, electricity, health care, communications, shelter and infrastructure)
- Determined work towards the eradication of poverty
- The promotion of basic human rights and responsibilities, within a framework of peace and social justice
- The celebration and nurturing of the 'soul' of communities, and respect for local cultural contexts where these do not undermine basic human rights
- Support for processes which enable collective participatory decision-making at all levels of society
- The building of the capacity of all relevant actors and stakeholders in the development process
- Respect for the integrity of the natural environment

In relation to the practice of community development itself, some of the key parameters within which it should operate are as follows:

- ❖ The involvement of all appropriate actors/stakeholders is required to achieve agreed priorities for action.
- ❖ Training and education is made available to communities and their representatives to ensure effective understanding and engagement.
- ❖ Appropriate mechanisms of accountability to all stakeholders are established.
- ❖ Clear and appropriate commitments are made by stakeholders to the implementation of agreed programmes.
- ❖ Conditions are created for a process of dynamic and sustainable growth and development.

The following are the issues identified and agreed by the conference and by corresponding delegates. The draft of the Declaration was sent to all delegates attending the conference and their comments have been incorporated into this final draft.

The IACD would welcome feedback in due course, of developments where this Declaration has been used positively so that these examples can be shared with our global membership.

A. Gender rights and community development

1. The African Union and national governments must recognise that for effective community development, men and women, including the most marginalised groups, must be equally involved in all stages of the development process including, for example, strategic planning, policy development and decision-making, reflecting a strategic approach based on gender equality between men and women. This should incorporate:
 - equal access to and control of local resources;
 - equal opportunities to participate in decision-making;
 - a recognition that men should be equally committed to struggle for gender equality at all levels of community activity including in key areas such as health care and AIDs prevention, education and local economic development;
 - equal access to information and education; and
 - equal pay for equal work.
2. The African Union, in partnership with NGOs and the community development community, should develop a new declaration on gender rights in Africa and subsequently press for its inclusion within national policy and legislative frameworks. Building on this process, the African Union and national governments should support local capacity-building reflecting gender-sensitive legislation and policy. In addition, the African Union should institute a monitoring mechanism for ensuring that national governments are actively making progress on gender issues at all levels, including within government, and establish a form of sanction for those governments which fail to make adequate progress.
3. National governments should be encouraged to establish gender rights commissions where these do not exist.
4. African governments must make education equally available to all children, from primary school level onwards, regardless of gender, and educational materials should be developed which are gender-neutral: that is, they do not stereotype genders into particular roles but challenge any inappropriate differentiation between men and women.

B. Local government and community development

1. The African Union should encourage more effective interaction between different levels of government within Africa. In addition, national governments should implement a process of effective decentralisation, which will guarantee administrative, political, financial, social and material empowerment of those at local government level. Without this, community development possibilities will be limited. To achieve this, communities need to be empowered to
 - i. determine their own priorities;
 - ii. initiate their own projects; and
 - iii. manage local decision-making in a way which is transparent, based on need and not on partisan views.
2. National governments should enable people to meet their basic human needs and build the capacity of local government, civil society, communities and individuals to support this goal.
3. The role of national governments in promoting community development at the level of local government implies
 - i. support for local communities in building capacity through, for example, training in the management of resources; processes which involve learners in determining their own needs; accessible support and training; and the development of a local entrepreneurial spirit.
 - ii. access to information and research, for example on local demographic data, area and community profiles and analyses of local strengths and gaps.

- iii. good communication links with reliable and affordable access to internet and email, telephone and transport links.

C. Community development in rural areas

1. The African Union should promote and support development in rural areas that is founded on 'bottom-up' partnership principles including the community, local NGOs and CBOs, all tiers of government and external funding bodies, and in a way that puts respect for the inherent capacity of local people at the heart of the development process.
2. National governments need to enhance communication and capacity-building with rural communities and ensure that sufficient resources are made available through local government to support autonomous civil society organisations at the community level, in order to reduce poverty and enhance personal dignity.
3. National governments need to develop and disseminate clearer institutional strategies for rural development which involve the whole range of different community development actors and stakeholders in rural areas.
4. National governments should ensure that the assessment of community development initiatives in rural areas and the evaluation of their performance are undertaken with a view to promoting models of best practice, with the African Union and regional groupings disseminating these models.
5. National governments should promote the use of appropriate technologies and/or science applications in rural communities, including the development of a critical mass of trained personnel for work amongst local communities aimed at self-reliance.

D. Civil society and community development: the role of NGOs

1. The African Union should rapport and encourage co-ordination of programmes and interlinking between NGOs, international partners and governments so that effective development outcomes are realised and there is dynamic NGO activity, thus building a vibrant and socially just civil society.
2. African governments must create enabling environments for the development of sustainable NGOs through
 - i. updating legislative and policy frameworks to ensure they reflect an empowering approach to civil society;
 - ii. supportive technical and financial backing; and
 - iii. investment in social capital.
3. African governments and international donors must support participatory development strategies that fully involve the rural and urban poor. The positive and non-partisan role of NGOs in educating and developing communities for the promotion of open and democratic governance for the betterment of local communities should be encouraged and enhanced by national and local governments.
4. National governments should acknowledge the significance of NGOs by establishing structures and mechanisms at all levels to better co-ordinate the work of local and international NGOs and to make them accountable to the communities they serve.
5. Civil society organisations should be strongly engaged with government in orienting the activity of international donors to the needs of local communities.

E. Community development and the environment

1. The African Union should develop and co-ordinate an Africa-wide strategy on natural resources such as watershed management, especially where those resources are shared, and establish and actively promote national standards for the management of these

resources; this requires effective networking and sharing of new techniques and practices for environmental protection.

2. The African Union should pursue a financial 'claim' for 'ecosystem services' which are provided by Africa's natural resources (such as its forests) for the rest of the planet. The revenue from this claim should be used for sustainable local development. The African Union should represent Africa's interests in this regard at the Ecological Debt Tribunal in 2006.
3. Community development values and principles should be embedded in all African Union and national environmental policies and strategies, especially in areas of common concern throughout Africa such as environmental education, to reinforce the capacity of local communities to manage their own environments.
4. The African Union and national governments should therefore develop policies of information, sensitization and education about sustainable development that can be applied at grassroots level.

F. Community development and local economic development

1. African Union and national structures and institutional arrangements for supporting local economic development should be both strengthened and decentralised to the maximum feasible degree in order that they may be as close as possible both to stakeholders and beneficiaries. This will require in turn a common vision and dialogue between partners which intervene in the local economy - for example, government and local government, community groups, microfinance institutions, private sector actors and political leaders.
2. The African Union and national governments should develop and fund an enabling environment and infrastructure (especially rural and farm-to-market roads) to promote the exchange of goods and services between communities and regions across Africa, thereby fostering local and regional economic development.
3. Policy frameworks at national and international levels should reflect the values of the sustainable community development approach and create the conditions for supporting sustainable local economic development, thus challenging the present 'brain drain' that is undermining the economies of many African countries.
4. Local government should ensure that local economic development structures, processes and funding arrangements should be locally-controlled and oriented as far as possible towards disadvantaged groups such as youths and women.

G. Working with refugees and migrants

1. The African Union should, as a matter of priority and working with regional coalitions, ensure effective leadership at national levels to prevent the development of crises such as inter-ethnic conflict and war that generate the creation of refugees.
2. The African Union, in collaboration with national governments, should establish accountability mechanisms to more effectively manage international resource flows provided for the support of refugees in refugee-receiving countries.
3. Civil society organisations working with refugees and new migrants perform an important function in their reception, support, settlement and integration. Consequently, the African Union and national governments should create an enabling environment that enhances the capacity of civil society organisations and supports the creation of a functional vibrant civil society providing capacity for refugee community organisations, as partners in community development. Standing committees should be set up at national, regional and local levels to facilitate the co-ordination of the activities of civil society organisations and to work in partnership with regional and national offices of the UNHCR.
4. National governments must commit resources to working with local communities that host refugees and new migrants to prepare them and facilitate the more effective settlement and integration of refugees into the host communities.

5. National governments should develop policies that allow people that have been refugees in any country for 15 years to be granted citizenship of the country of asylum.

H. Working in situations of conflict

1. Where conflicts develop at community level, these are often based on partisan views, for example on party political, tribal or religious differences; in these situations, national governments must intervene to resolve disputes in a manner which strengthens local civil society based on a holistic recognition of local needs and in line with the principles of community development set out above. The African Union's role, in collaboration with national governments, must be to embark on a process of mass sensitisation and education, based on these principles of participation, solidarity, equality and social inclusion and to ensure that conflict resolution strategies incorporate an understanding of the roots of conflicts.
2. National, regional and international responses must acknowledge the way that poverty and the competition for resources drive local and regional conflicts. The most important strategic approaches by national governments and the African Union should be built on the further development of poverty reduction strategies: all national governments and the African Union must thus commit to make poverty a thing of the past within a defined but realistic timetable. This will require a strengthened capacity by the African Union to challenge international global forces and actors which operate to maintain division and poverty within the continent, and to ensure the effective management of Africa's resources in the interests of its people.
3. Conflict resolution must become a major priority of government at all levels: this implies the development of training for local communities in conflict resolution, including the use of expert facilitators; education programmes which identify the causes of conflict; and the adoption of national and local policy frameworks for the peaceful resolution of conflicts.
4. The critical condition for the peaceful resolution of conflicts is the existence within each state of legal constitutions reflecting democratic values and processes, reflecting the realities of each country in terms of their geopolitical, linguistic, cultural and economic conditions. The legal framework within each country must ensure the separation between judiciary, the executive and the legislature as well as the encouragement of active autonomous civil society.
5. The African Union should establish a standing peace-keeping capability to intervene at an early stage in any serious regional or local conflicts.

J. Partnerships between NGOs and educationalists

1. African governments and other agencies (local government, NGOs, international donor agencies and educationalists) need to establish clear policies on community development at all levels. These policies should indicate clear relationships and structures for communication between partners, and ensure clear mechanisms of support for those involved in grassroots community development work including the resourcing of NGOs and educational institutions which offer social and community development education.
2. African countries should promote social and community development education at secondary and tertiary institutions as a discipline and as a profession, and ensure that all NGOs working in community development should recruit and work with trained professionals. NGOs should participate in the development of curricula for social and community development education.
3. National governments should ensure effective support for networking and facilitate collaboration and co-operation between NGOs and educationalists, to enable sharing of knowledge and experience, the creation of new knowledge, the dissemination of research and evaluation findings, and collaboration in research.

4. Community development workers, trainers and consultants need appropriate support to enable sustainable community development. This should be in the form of
 - i. education and training, including provision of lifelong learning opportunities with appropriate levels of funding and support;
 - ii. access to appropriate information technology and learning materials and equipment; and
 - iii. access to and knowledge of relevant information and resources to enable continuous learning.
5. Universities should encourage the use of properly-supported and supervised students to undertake outreach work in local communities as part of their work programmes: this will both benefit the communities and help students to become more active citizens.

1. Footnote:

The IACD is the recognised international NGO which promotes the values, the theory and the practice of community development worldwide. At an international level, it does this through its special consultative status with the United Nations, through consultations with international bodies such as the ILO, the European Union, ECOSOC and with the African Union, and through participation in major global events such as the world summit on social development, the summit against racism and the World Social Forum. The IACD works in partnership with local, national, regional and international bodies in different regions of the world, operating as a network of networks. It has an elected Board with members representing most regions of the world. It promotes training events, workshops, conferences and publications, for example on the use of information technology to promote community development in rural areas, and through its partnership with the Community Development Journal.

Please visit www.iacdglobal.org or email iacdglobal@ed.ac.uk for details of our activities, for membership arrangements or to discuss potential partnership working; or contact our Development Officer Tara O'Leary at tara@stara.org.uk

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The Hon Olusegun Obasanjo
Chair, African Union
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Addis Ababa

Dear President Obasanjo

African civil society

In the recent debates about African development, the campaign to Make Poverty History, statements by the G8 and so on, we believe that inadequate attention has been given to the role of ordinary African people themselves in strengthening civil society, particularly through the medium of community development, and thus strengthening good governance in African countries. In this context, we believe that the enclosed report will be of considerable interest to yourself and your colleagues. I think it is self-explanatory and is the outcome of three to four years work with colleagues active in community development across Africa. We hope you find it of sufficient interest to circulate to your colleagues and would be pleased to have your comments on it.

With best wishes

Gary Craig
Professor and President, IACD