

February 26, 2024

Executive Directors
The African Development Bank
Avenue Joseph Anoma
01 BP 1387 Abidjan 01
Côte d'Ivoire

Dear Executive Directors,

RE: The importance of creating space for meaningful civil society engagement at the 2024 AfDB Annual Meetings

The AfDB CSO Working Group is composed of more than seventy civil society organizations (CSOs) from across Africa and beyond. We collaborate to foster accountability and responsible investments in international development finance, and champion the interests of communities impacted by development projects. Our work is dedicated to monitoring the AfDB's activities, policies, and projects to promote inclusion, effective stakeholder engagement, free and timely access to information, environmental sustainability, accountability and transparency. These efforts are aimed at enhancing project performance and outcomes while preventing adverse impacts in our countries.

Since 2018, we have observed a lack of dedicated engagement spaces for CSOs within the framework of the AfDB's Annual Meetings. While we acknowledge the Bank's effort in organizing separate continental and regional CSO forums, the nature of these forums often resembles partnership meetings rather than platforms for meaningful and critical dialogue with the Bank's decision-makers.

The AfDB Annual Meetings are a cornerstone event, attracting approximately 3,000 participants and offering a reflective moment on the AfDB Group's commitment to accomplishing its mission of developing the African continent and improving the lives of its people, allowing the organization and different development stakeholders to take stock of progress made towards achieving its mission. The role of CSOs in promoting sustainable development, social inclusion, and accountability is instrumental and becomes even more critical during these Annual Meetings. Engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders is fundamental to enriching the decision-making process and making sure that communities are not left behind.

Given the theme of the 2024 Annual Meetings, “**Africa’s Transformation, African Development Bank Group, and Reforms of the Global Financial Architecture**” and recognizing the increasingly constructive role of CSOs in development processes, the upcoming 59th AGM in Nairobi, Kenya, presents a unique opportunity to reinvigorate and meaningfully commit to civil society participation. We propose the inclusion of a Civil Society Policy Forum at this event, as it is done by other peer Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs).

This forum would serve as a vital platform for CSOs to engage in dialogue with AfDB management and staff, providing an opportunity to amplify the voices of those positively or adversely affected by AfDB-financed projects. Incorporating such a space within the Annual Meetings aligns with the AfDB’s CSO Engagement Action Plan (currently in draft stage) and the global recognition of the importance of stakeholder participation.

We recommend that the 2024 AfDB Annual Meetings, include, at a minimum, space for:

Thematic CSO-led sessions: We suggest issuing a call for proposals for CSO-led sessions on the Bank’s website and through social media to reach both continental and global civil society organizations. The selection process should extend beyond Bank-funded CSOs to embrace other groups offering critical and independent perspectives on the AfDB's work. Sessions should foster meaningful dialogue and critical discussions on challenges and opportunities facing the AfDB, with active participation from Bank staff.

CSO roundtable discussion with AfDB Executive Directors: Creating a space for direct engagement between civil society and the Bank's Executive Directors, as key decision makers and representatives of the governments of which CSOs are constituents, is paramount. This interaction aims to bridge communication gaps, share community concerns, foster mutual understanding, and explore avenues for collaboration.

CSO town hall meeting with AfDB Senior Management: Allocating dedicated time for CSOs to engage with the AfDB's senior management is crucial. This meeting would allow management to provide updates on the Bank's priorities, including the Hi5 and other Bank initiatives, and directly address questions and concerns from CSOs and community representatives. This would also provide space to community members who have been directly affected by AfDB funded projects to share their lived experiences and give insight into processes and implementation on the ground.

Sincerely,

Civil Society Working Group on the AfDB

For questions or for further information, contact:

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