



WEST AFRICA CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTE



Stockholms  
universitet

# Regionalising African Civil Societies: Lessons, opportunities and constraints

Marianne Millstein



## Contents

Acronyms.....	4
Foreword .....	5
Introduction.....	6
Regionalism, regionalisation and civil society .....	7
Regional integration and opportunities and constraints for civil society .	9
Polycentric governance and the politics of civil society activism .....	11
Everyday urban struggles: transnational networks and relations .....	13
Changing landscape of civic agency: urban protests in a regional perspective.....	13
Identity formation and sites of citizenship .....	13
Concluding discussion .....	15
Research agendas on civil society and (insurgent/accidental) regionalism.....	17
References .....	18
Appendix 1: Participants and titles of papers.....	19
Appendix 2: Concept Note and Call for Papers .....	22
Appendix 3: Programme.....	24

## Acronyms

AU	African Union
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EAC	East African Community
EACSOFF	East Africa Civil Society Forum
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreements
EU	European Union
NAI	Nordic Africa Institute
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PHM	People's Health Movement
REPAOC	Réseau des plates forms d'ong d'Afrique de l'ouest et du centre
SACBTA	Southern Africa Cross Border Trade Association
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADC-NGO	Southern African Development Community Council for NGOs
SAT	Southern Africa Trust
SAMA	Southern Africa Mineworkers Association
SAPSN	Southern Africa People's Solidarity Network
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
WACSI	West Africa Civil Society Institute
WACSOFF	West Africa Civil Society Forum
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
SAPSN	Southern Africa People's Solidarity Network

## Foreword

The workshop entitled *Regionalising African civil societies: Lessons, opportunities and constraints* was held in Uppsala, Sweden in October 2014 and co-organised by the Nordic Africa Institute (Sweden), the West Africa Civil Society Institute (Ghana) and the Department of Human Geography at Stockholm University (Sweden). The workshop was part of a larger programme at NAI that has explored various aspects of regionalisation in Africa, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

The workshop gathered participants from African NGOs and researchers working on regionalisation and civil society issues. This provided a unique opportunity to engage in conversations about research and practice. During the two days, we moved from an initial emphasis on the role of civil society in regional integration and the regionalisation of civil society itself, to questioning the idea of the region as a territory, as a space for political action, for economic activities and for identity and belonging.

The workshop and this report are small but hopefully important contributions to a research agenda aimed at deepening our understanding of

the relations between regionalisation and civil society. The workshop identified two important tasks for such an agenda: bridging the gaps between research on regional issues and civil society within academic disciplines, and also bringing research and practice closer together. Such conversations are critical if we are to understand the opportunities and constraints for a regionalisation ‘from below.’

We sincerely thank the participants for sharing their views and experiences. We are also grateful to SIDA for financial support and to Annika Franklin at NAI for her invaluable help in organising the workshop.

Marianne Millstein

*Nordic Africa Institute*

Omolara Balogun

*West Africa Civil Society Institute*

Ilda Lindell

*Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University*

*Uppsala, February 2015*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In spite of much writing about civil society in Africa, we still do not know much about the role of civil society in regional integration and to what extent civil societies are also regionalising. Regional integration in Africa has been state-centric, meaning that states are seen as the drivers of economic and political integration in a context of neoliberal global transformation. However, a new regionalism approach has given rise to a broader research agenda in which non-state actors are seen as integral to regional integration (Fioramonti 2014 p. 2). This emerging research and debate suggest that:

... civil society is not only likely to build regionalism 'from below,' but also that some processes within the civil society arena can lead to meaningful contestations of existing regionalism paradigms and contribute to reshaping regions in line with 'alternative' agendas. (Fioramonti 2014 p. 5)

In this new approach, civil society organisations (CSOs) are recognised as important actors on the regional political playing field. It also raises questions about to what extent civil society is regionalised and if civil society actors can contribute to a regionalisation from below and also construct regional identities as a basis for alternative regionalism.

This workshop aimed to contribute to this agenda with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa. When we developed the theme, we set out a number of arguments about why these issues should be explored in more depth. First, regional networks may strengthen civil society organisations in their role of holding national and local governments accountable and democratic. Second, they have a role to play in representing the grassroots in relation to bodies such as the African Union and regional institutions, in monitoring policymaking at the regional level and in ensuring a degree of accountability by regional governing bodies. Third, civil society networks may facilitate collaboration, solidarity and sometimes the movement of members across countries, and in some cases work actively against rising xenophobia. However, these potential roles are shaped by the nature of regionalisation and the political spaces opened up to civil society. It is also critical to ex-

plore the politics within states and civil society that affect whose voices are heard and represented in regional governance.

The workshop developed along three inter-related lines of thought. First, we asked questions related to the political spaces that have been created at the regional level, and to what extent civil society actors have the capacity to exploit these and, if so, around what issues. Second we wanted to explore the regionalisation of civil society itself and the opportunities and challenges for linking local, national and regional civil society activism. What voices are being heard and whose voices might be excluded from these processes? This also led us to ask questions about identity formation, collective action and protest in a regional perspective, and the geographical and social differentiations of civil society across regions as well as within states. Third, we had a specific urban focus on some of these dynamics, in particular to what extent urban protests, grassroots struggles and informal networks can be seen as being regionalised. For instance, informal trading is a mode of economic integration that is largely ignored by regional institutions. Trading networks can also build social and political relations and construct shared identities in, for instance, local market places.<sup>2</sup> Such cross-border urban networks were also explored in a previous workshop under the same regional programme at the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) in December 2013.

The presentations and discussions shed light on many shared experiences, but also contradictions, in civil society activism and engagement in relation to regional processes. The papers were organised around three key-note contributions that addressed one or several of these issues. The first day emphasised the state of regional integration and the role of civil society, and also some of the challenges within civil society when seeking to inform decision-making at different geographical levels. Two sessions explored these questions in Southern, East and West Africa, with contributions by both researchers and NGO participants. Day two shifted the focus to grassroots mobilisation and protest in urban Africa, and how these could be explored in a regional perspective. Here, questions of identity-

1. The report is based on submitted papers and the author's notes from the workshop. I want to thank Andreas Godsäter for constructive input on a draft version of this report.

2. Discussed by Brown and Kinyanjui

making and citizenship and informal networks as examples of ‘accidental’<sup>3</sup> or ‘insurgent regionalism’<sup>4</sup> were debated.

### Regionalism, regionalisation and civil society

An important aim of the workshop was to explore what academics term the *multiscalar* and *polycentric* nature of civil society and regional governance. Multiscalar suggests that different geographical levels are not separated or naturally given, but relational and socially produced, and that governance is informed by shifting relations across such geographical levels. For instance, as we also discussed in the workshop, civil society actors can raise issues at a regional level to put pressure on their national governments. At the same time, the character of regional decision-making is informed by national interests and identities. Polycentrism refers to the associated changes in power dynamics; how globalisation transforms the state’s power to steer both the economy and society and how governance involves multiple actors from the state, the market and civil society from the local to the global level.

Concepts such as multiscalar and polycentric governance have emerged in broader debates about globalisation, regionalism and the role of world regions (Scholte 2014, 2000; Fioramonti 2014; Murray 2006). Civil society’s role in regional integration has to a large extent been ignored in these debates. As a political concept, regionalism has most often focused on the role of political elites and on state-led regional integration above the nation state (Fioramonti 2014), while issues of political identity have been limited to debates about regionalism at sub-national levels (Dahlman 2009). At the transnational level, the new regionalism approach has given more attention to civil society and citizens. Key questions are to what extent civil society can inform regional governance, whether civil society itself is regionalising, and to what extent regional civil societies can challenge market-led regional integration and promote more people-centred regionalism (Fioramonti 2014). This is important when we seek to understand the implications of regional integration in developing societies where civil society is assumed to play a critical role in realising both development goals and democratisation. African civil societies thus engage institutions across geographical levels from the international aid regime, through regional

institutions that increasingly emphasise social and political issues in addition to economic integration, and national and local political spaces. In order to explore the role of civil society in regionalisation, we must therefore unpack power relations between regional institutions, state actors and civil society as well as dynamics within civil society.

A key starting point is what we mean by civil society and the political spaces and capacities of different civil society actors to engage in governance at the local, regional and even global levels. Civil society is often conceptualised as a sphere operating between the state, family and market. The literature places different emphasis on the relative autonomy of civil society from the state, the stratification of civil society according to social identities and power as well as civil society as a relational sphere and space for contentious politics where the state seeks to rule through hegemony and consent but can also be met with counter-hegemonic resistance (Fioramonti 2014). Some also problematize the relevance of civil society in African contexts (and in the global South more generally), given the concept’s intimate links to European theories and experiences (Obadare and Williams 2014; Chatterje 2006; Mamdani 1996), where civil society is also an exclusionary space for a relative autonomous middle class.

There is no space to elaborate on these debates in detail. Following Fioramonti (2014) and Scholte (2014), we adopt a critical approach in which we see civil society as a relational sphere of deliberation and struggle that encompasses multiple identities and interests. This understanding has two important implications. First, civil society is not delinked from the state or regional and global institutions, and civil society actors make use of various political spaces from the local to the global to raise their grievances and issues. Second, civil society is differentiated by shifting capacities and power to engage institutions at different geographical levels. This shapes their strategies and practices, and the various roles that civil society actors play in regional governance.

These two approaches – civil society as a relational sphere of action informed by multiple interests, and multiscalar, polycentric governance – open the way for analyses that explore how different kinds of civil society activism are embedded at various geographical levels and informed by issues that are simultaneously global, regional, national, urban and local. We were particularly interested in these varied roles and how CSOs make strategic choices and with what effect. We were also concerned with

3. Term used by Obadare

4. Term used by Brown

how civil society is differentiated along social and geographical dimensions. This led to debates about differences between, for instance, professionalised NGOs and grassroots networks, and capacities to link regional and national/local civil society activism.

Africa's civil societies are not only growing in number and diversifying in form and focus, they are also internationalising by creating organisations and networks across national and regional borders. These civil society networks vary in terms of structure, interests and links to various constituencies. They may include both better-resourced (and influential) local and national NGOs and regional NGO networks, as well as local and transnationally coalescing grassroots initiatives that draw upon existing experience with voluntary associations in African societies. They emerge around a range of issues such as the informal economy and trade, democratisation and human rights, service delivery, health and gender. Not all these actors are necessarily regional, nor are they delinked from national identities and spaces even when they aim to inform regional processes. As a starting point, it is therefore helpful to tease out the five dimensions that Godsäter has argued define whether civil society is regional:

- That it creates regional organisational forms
- That it frames issues regionally
- That it engages with formal regional governance
- That it uses regional donor funds
- That it (attempts to) construct regional identities

These criteria and the identification of specific roles in governance are perhaps best suited to understanding the regionalisation of formal and organised civil society actors, and do not capture some of the informal networking and relations that might also have regional implications. This tension between a professionalised sector and more informal and grassroots networks was a recurrent theme in the workshop, and we return to it below.

Godsäter also identified some challenges to civil society regionalisation that became recurrent

themes over the next two days.<sup>5</sup> First, civil society NGOs struggle with charges that they are part of an elite or an urban-based middle class, and that they have low levels of legitimacy among 'ordinary' citizens. Second, although regional issues are addressed, many actors are shaped by nationalist sentiments and interests even when engaging with other civil society actors and within regional institutions. Third, regional organisations struggle with donor dependency and are vulnerable to rapid shifts in funding. Fourth, although they might share some regional agendas, regional networks are heterogeneous and may find it difficult to speak with one voice in regional decision-making. Fifth, while some space for action exists and regional institutions seek to become more people-centred, regional civil society seldom has significant influence on policy-making processes. Finally, there are geographical asymmetries regarding how and where these networks work. Thus, for instance, NGOs from one country may dominate regional networks. Geographical asymmetries are also reflected in the embedded nature of NGOs in urban contexts. This urban dimension informs some accusations of limited legitimacy because many NGOs are perceived to be divorced from the grassroots struggles of the urban and rural poor.

In the following sections, we elaborate on these questions and challenges. It is impossible to do justice to the richness of the discussions and experiences shared, and the report is built around key issues rather than the detailed presentations and papers. Many of the papers provide thorough analyses of existing academic literature on regionalisation and civil society, which we also do not delve into in this report. An overview of the participants and titles of their papers can be found in Appendix 1.

---

5. Contributions by Iheduru, Odhiambo (West Africa) and Atiti (East Africa) confirmed that these are challenges in all three regions explored here.



## Regional integration and opportunities and constraints for civil society

A more people-centred vision and an explicit role for civil society are now important dimensions in the policies of African regional institutions. With these shifts towards civil society and dialogues between civil society and regional institutions, there has been a growth in civil society organisations and networks working at the regional level.<sup>6</sup> With contributions from East, West and Southern Africa, we discussed commonalities as well as the historical and geographical specifics of these regional experiences. The workshop revolved around key topics that were central to the work of the NGO participants, such as peace and security, democracy and human rights (including independent media, election monitoring and socioeconomic rights) and trade. These reflect international development agendas, in which civil society is seen as a critical aspect of both democratisation and development. This change gained momentum as part of a shift in regional integration in the context of neoliberal global transformation and the spread of liberal democracy.<sup>7</sup> The recent wave of regionalism, emerging since the 1980s, represents a partial shift from previous regional integration, which was largely a state-driven process emphasising economic integration.

A people-centred dimension is evident in ongoing policy processes in West, East and Southern Africa. The Economic Community of West-African States (ECOWAS) is working on a new Vision 2020, for which input from civil society has been an explicit objective. Civil society input was also emphasised in the negotiations of the new Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) with the European Union (EU).<sup>8</sup> In East Africa, a consultative dialogue framework has been put in place together with a community development strategy and a social charter. An East African Court of Justice has been established, and there is a West Africa Community Court of Justice that has become an important vehicle for

civil society in challenging national governments.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, civil society regional networks have developed strategic partnerships with regional institutions through regional dialogue platforms: West-Africa Civil Society Forum (WACSOF) in West Africa, East Africa Civil Society Forum (EACSOF) in East Africa and the Southern Africa Development Community Council for NGOs (SADC-NGO) in Southern Africa. WACSOF was initiated with the assistance of ECOWAS after the latter recognised it needed better and institutionalised dialogue with CSOs in the region.<sup>10</sup> Similar reasoning lay behind the establishment of SADC-NGO in 1998.<sup>11</sup> In East Africa, EACSOF was granted observer status in the East Africa Community (EAC) in 2001.<sup>12</sup>

Regional institutions thus recognise the role of civil society in regional governance. But while regional political space may exist, a critical issue is the differing capacities of civil society actors to engage regional institutions and inform political agendas and decision-making processes. Fioramonti (2014) identifies three roles for CSOs in regional governance: legitimisation of the status quo where CSOs, for instance, engage in dialogue but have limited influence, but still lend some legitimacy to regional institutions' participatory rhetoric; manipulation, where CSOs take advantage of opportunities in regional institutions to push issues that otherwise would not be on the agenda (but not necessarily questioning the underlying ideas and forces in contemporary regionalism); and contestation, where actors challenge current regionalism and push for alternative regional agendas. Importantly, these approaches are not mutually exclusive and depend on the politics of governance as well as on shifting modes of conflict and cooperation within civil society (Fioramonti 2014).

A key question, then, is whether it is possible to use these formal spaces to shape regional political agendas, or whether CSOs risk being absorbed into

6. Godsäter problematized to what extent these are really regional in his presentation. For instance, some regional networks are dominated by actors in one country such as South Africa in the SADC region and Kenya in the EAC.

7. Discussed by Godsäter, Odhiambo, Iheduru

8. Discussed by Iheduru, Diallo (WANEP) and Benissan (REPAOC)

9. Discussed Iheduru focusing on West-Africa and Atiti focusing on East Africa

10. Discussed by Iheduru. See also <http://www.wacsosf.net/index.php/en/about-wacsosf/2013-07-10-14-52-13> accessed 15 Dec. 2014

11. <http://www.sadccngo.org/index.php/history> accessed 15 Dec. 2014

12. Discussed by Odhiambo

processes where they have limited influence but, by being consulted and participating, give decisions legitimacy. Given the powerful forces – states and business – that seem to drive economic and political integration and the democratic deficit in regional institutions, which largely define which CSOs are included and excluded, it can be challenging to contest hegemonic positions and promote an alternative regionalism based on more people-centred visions.<sup>13</sup> While non-state actors and social issues have emerged on the regional agenda, economic integration is still the main objective. Also, as Godsäter and other presenters pointed out, national regulations, interests and identities continue to shape regional politics and governance.

Iheduru argued that regional institutions, and the mechanisms for institutional engagement they put in place, are decisive in shaping the role of civil society and who is included and excluded in these invited spaces for participation (cf. Cornwall 2002). Power is still mainly vested in the states and regional institutions. In the case of West Africa, Iheduru argued that this provides an opportunity to weed out more critical voices of civil society and alternative visions of what regionalism could mean beyond the current neoliberal agenda. Business networks and associations have a much more prominent role in informing decision-making and political agendas than civil society, whose role is to advance a human rights and democratic agenda as a basis for (regional) development. Similarly, while there are positive developments in CSO cooperation on human rights and democratisation in East Africa, democratic developments within the region are asymmetrical and many countries are what Atiti calls fragile democracies. Iheduru also argued that most of the regional initiatives have been put in place to solve governance problems within ECOWAS, and do not necessarily represent strong commitment to more substantive democratic regional governance. Similar observations on Southern Africa were made by Godsäter.<sup>14</sup> Presenters from East Africa also touched upon obstacles for civil society arising from regional internal governance challenges, particularly in relation to the non-realisation in practice of human rights and transparency.<sup>15</sup>

National sentiments that still shape regional cooperation were identified as key challenges to

regionalisation. This is reflected in, among other issues, the varied approaches to human rights and democracy, in particular the limitations on regional courts in instructing national governments. National interests also became a key bone of contention in the complex negotiations of a new EPA between ECOWAS and the EU.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, some countries have stronger civil societies and, therefore, become dominant actors within regional networks, for example, South Africa in the SADC and Kenya in the EAC.<sup>17</sup> Such national interests within regional civil society networks can also be a major constraint on issue-framing and identity-making: i.e., forging a regional identity as a basis for civil society activism. We return to this below.

This does not mean that making use of regional spaces cannot have important political effects or improve regional policies and decision-making. Even though the prospects for more people-centred regional integration may seem daunting in the short run, participants gave examples of how locally embedded actors working on different issues can play important roles in and through regional civil society activism. These experiences also suggest that civil society's role in regional governance (as well as the degree of regionalisation of civil society) differs between sectors and issues. While some actors seek formal strategic cooperation and critical engagement, others opt to work without formal regional institutions. The strategies reflect different CSO typologies and the extent to which the CSOs emphasise research and providing technical and policy advice, or engage more explicitly in advocating more radical political agendas (Godsäter 2013).

Many regional NGOs, including those represented at this workshop, see capacity-building among civil society actors in their region as a key objective. Such efforts are not inherently regional, but also target national and local civil society actors. Some networks are established with the assistance of global NGOs and international funding to meet particular objectives in promoting human rights, democracy and in building information and capacity among civil society in their respective regions.<sup>18</sup> Others have evolved out of existing NGO platforms such as REPAOC, a regional NGO network in West Africa. REPAOC emerged after the World So-

---

13. Discussed by Atiti, Iheduru and Godsäter. See also Godsäter 2013

14. See Godsäter 2013.

15. Discussed by Atiti and Bukenya

---

16. Discussed by Iheduru

17. Discussed by Godsäter

18. Discussed by Iheduru

cial Forum in Bamako in 2007, but has since sought to engage with regional institutions.

Regional civil society actors are also working closely with regional institutions on particular issues. For instance, West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) is a key partner of ECOWAS in peacebuilding efforts in the West Africa region. WANEP has worked systematically to integrate bottom-up and top-down approaches in its peacebuilding endeavours. It has strategically built regional cooperation with ECOWAS while at the same time developing strong national networks in the 15 member states, involving some 500 local organisations. Bringing local knowledge and actors into peacebuilding efforts is seen as critical to building national and regional stability and WANEP has made a strategic decision to cooperate with regional bodies rather than embark upon a more activist approach.<sup>19</sup>

An example of a movement that has evolved from a local initiative is the People's Health Movement (PHM) in Uganda, which now seeks to promote health rights through community-based approaches across East Africa. Regional actors can also play a critical role in promoting democratic processes. The East Africa Law Society went on fact-finding missions to Zanzibar and Uganda and discovered that observers based in the region are able to grasp the dynamics and assist in preventing irregularities and possibly also violence. In Southern Africa, Southern Africa Trust (SAT) provided assistance to the mineworkers' unions in their efforts to strengthen the rights of migrant labourers. This also led to the establishment of a Southern Africa Mineworkers Association (SAMA) that can transcend the previously fragmented efforts by various national unions to support ex-mineworkers.<sup>20</sup> There are also regional networks – such as the Southern Africa People's Solidarity Network (SAPSN) – that question the trajectories of ongoing processes of regional integration, which they perceive to be neoliberal and hegemonic, and seek to contribute to an alternative regionalism.

These efforts to strengthen regional civil society networks and engage in regional governance have encountered many institutional challenges. Volatile

and unequal funding opportunities were one critical issue, both in terms of accessing international funding and in mobilising national resources. Regional networks that include many different kinds of civil society actors will also have to contend with very different financial and human capacities. One strategy adopted by actors was building strategic relationships with academic institutions. These strategies have been important for PHM and larger regional networks such as WANEP and SAT. Other challenges mentioned by NGO participants, included communications within the networks, staff capacities and qualifications and, sometimes, aligning a network's national and regional internal governance.

### **Polycentric governance and the politics of civil society activism**

In a situation where regional institutions aim to move from a state- to a people-centred mode of regional governance, critical questions of political representation and legitimacy necessarily arise. Some of the questions we raised aimed at exploring power and politics within civil society and the different relations with state actors and political institutions from the regional to the local scale: what interests do regional civil society networks represent? What can they accomplish that CSOs within local or national borders cannot and what challenges do they face? How are these organisations and networks informed by social and geographical relations? One challenge is that the power of civil society to voice citizens' interests is asymmetrical within regions. Godsäter pointed out that East Africa is dominated by Kenyan NGOs, while South African NGOs are strong within SADC; hence, some countries are more powerful than others. Also, Atiti argued that some of these differences have to do with the internal dynamics within civil society and among citizens, given that there are multiple identities and interests that shape strategies and action even within civil society. In addition to these internal dynamics, country-specific regulation of civil society also informs its strategies and actions at national and regional levels.

Asymmetrical power relations within civil society raise difficult questions of ownership, voice and representation, which reflect differences in resources, geographical location and social identity. There are discrepancies between highly formalised civil society and grassroots networks and organisations, which may also have very different opportunities to

19. In his paper Iheduru warns of patronage relations between WANEP and ECOWAS in these processes. He also suggested that more attention could be directed to informal actors as key peace-building contributors even if they are not formalized civil society

20. Discussed by Tati and Moyo

engage in political processes. Many presentations touched on the tensions between a reasonably well resourced NGO sector dominated by urban middle classes with access to donor funding and grassroots movements dealing with everyday grievances. The professionalised NGO sector has greater capacity to engage within available political spaces at urban, national and regional levels. By contrast, grassroots struggles are situated and often operate outside these spaces and take other forms. There are therefore important challenges related to how civil society can bring multiple voices into national and regional decision-making processes. These challenges raise critical questions about the legitimacy and accountability of what is seen as 'shallow' or top-down modes of citizen participation and people-centred development in regional institutions.

Odhiambo presented preliminary results from a small survey of East African civil society, where grassroots organisations seem to be disconnected from EACSO processes and have limited information about how to access these institutions. As noted above, CSOs vary greatly in their origins. From a more critical perspective, several participants warned of the dangers of the professionalization of civil society with the growth of the NGO sector in the regions, particularly perhaps, those NGOs largely set up by global NGOs or external funders. This professionalization is double-edged. While it may provide access to resources and strengthen the ability of actors to pursue objectives such as capacity building and advocacy, these actors risk detaching themselves from the everyday realities of citizens. CSOs, or rather NGOs as a particular form of civil society, are perceived as being driven by an urban middle class with sometimes limited and precarious ties to grassroots networks and organisations involving the urban and rural poor.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, there are networks that seek to link these issues both informally and formally. In Southern Africa, everyday struggles, critical civil society actors and trade unions came together in SAPSN with the explicit aim of promoting an alternative regionalism to counter SADC's market-driven integration. Also, informal trading relations have been linked through Southern Africa Cross Border Traders' Association (SACBTA) in order to promote the interests of informal traders across the region.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the dichotomy between regionalised and professionalised

NGOs and localised grassroots struggles can be oversimplified. Even apparently local and situated struggles may have transnational links, street vendors and shack dwellers being two such cases. Some of these links may be fairly formal and supported by national and international NGOs.<sup>23</sup> As Obadare points out, and as Brown also touches upon in her paper, citizens and networks can be involved in unintentional or what Obadare has called 'accidental regionalism.'

Such complexities are also evident in the engagements with regional governance. Some NGOs that closely engage with formal regional, national and local institutions simultaneously embrace more critical agendas and engage with grassroots movements. Actors critical of current regional integration agendas, such as regional and national trade union networks relate to regional political processes and can sometimes draw support from NGOs with closer links to regional institutions. This seems to be partly the case with the mine workers union in Southern Africa, which got support from SAT in its efforts to address the rights of ex-mineworkers returning to their home countries after working in South Africa. This example also reveals the tensions that still arise when national regulations and interests are poorly adjusted to the reality of regional labour mobility in Southern Africa.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, and paradoxically,<sup>25</sup> civil society actors can use opportunities provided by regional institutions to pursue their own work in challenging the regional agendas of those institutions. Thus, many NGOs that opposed the new trade agreement between ECOWAS and the EU were also supported by ECOWAS's civil society dialogue aimed at strengthening the voice of civil society in the negotiations.<sup>26</sup> This suggests that, as with state-civil society relations at national and local levels, civil society actors move between political opposition and political engagement at the regional level. To use Fioramonti's distinctions, their roles shift between, or simultaneously work as, legitimisation, manipulation and contestation.

21. Discussed by Godsäter, Iheduru, Odhiambo, Obadare

22. See Godsäter, 2013.

23. Discussed by Skage and Brown

24. Discussed by Tati and Moyo

25. Discussed by Odhiambo and Iheduru

26. Discussed by Iheduru

## Everyday urban struggles: transnational networks and relations

During day two of the workshop, we explored grassroots and informal networks that could become building blocks for regional civil society and/or a vehicle for regionalism/regionalisation from below. The regional is not as explicit in these experiences, yet plays a real and potential role in several ways. Some of the papers provided different perspectives on, for instance, our previous discussions on enabling regional trade and on informal trading, which latter also drives cross-border mobility within and beyond the 'naturalised' boundaries of regional institutions. Moyo explored how informal trade had recently been made a more central concern in SADC thanks to informal contacts through former civil society activists now working in SADC institutions. Brown discussed informal global trading networks as a form of insurgent regionalism, while Kinyanjui saw informal trading and markets as part of the cosmopolitan African city. These networks do not necessarily follow the taken-for-granted borders of a region defined by economic and state integration, but can produce other forms of region and regionalism.

### **Changing landscape of civic agency: urban protests in a regional perspective**

The workshop aimed to understand the renewed popular mobilisation and urban protest in Africa in a regional perspective. Regionalisation of civil society relates not only to linkages 'upwards' to regional/continental/international institutions, but also 'downwards' to multiple forms of urban protest. There has been discussion of the extent to which intensified urban unrest in sub-Saharan Africa after 2011 could be seen as an effect of the revolutionary events in North Africa.<sup>27</sup> At the Uppsala workshop, our discussions of these relations were actualised by the protests in Burkina Faso. One should be cautious about drawing too many parallels with the Arab Spring. Even if some of the drivers are the same, such as economic marginalisation and political exclusion, protests are often unpredictable and can be triggered by very different and often local issues. Moreover, many African countries have long histories of struggle, so that any intensification of

unrest is not merely an offspring of the Arab Spring, but situated in its own history.<sup>28</sup>

Yet, in a more globalised world, what happens elsewhere informs other struggles.<sup>29</sup> New technologies and the use of social media as a tool for mobilisation and as a means of representing ongoing struggles link protests and other events across the globe in new ways and have attracted particular attention. Civil society networks such as those linking regional NGOs, organised social movements and trade unions can play a crucial role in regional and continental bodies, but also are a link to expressions of (urban) protest and mobilisation.

Yet while protests may draw symbolically on events elsewhere in the world, there seem to be weak links between less organised modes of collective action and practice and the NGO sector, which makes it difficult for these voices to be heard in national and regional decision-making processes. There are, however, exceptions, and these experiences might provide lessons for how to build such alliances. Skage reported two such experiences from Kenya: Slumdweller International (SDI) that has built a global network based on local and national grassroots networks with the support of national and international NGOs, and local and international networks of informal traders. Although these actors sometimes get involved in local and national politics and patronage, they have also brought grassroots voices on to the regional and global stage.<sup>30</sup>

### **Identity formation and sites of citizenship**

If we are to understand civil society's role in driving regional integration through engagement at the regional level, we must also understand the different values that it brings to the table and the diversity of interests being represented.<sup>31</sup> These reflect a key challenge we have touched upon: the different actors within civil society and their embeddedness in

27. See for instance the Council for Africa (2012) and E. Obadare and W. Williams (2014).

28. This point was raised in a blog on 21 November 2014 by Mohamed Keita in response to the Burkina Faso revolts, see <http://africasacountry.com/how-not-to-write-about-africa-use-african-spring/>

29. Discussed by Iheduru (social media as a liberation technology), Obadare and Geuder

30. Discussed by Skage.

31. Discussed in papers by Godsäter, Iheduru and Atiti, and also link to the issues raised by Odhiambo and Moyo

particular interests and positions such as the urban and middle class. During the second day we examined these questions more closely and addressed the sites of citizenship formation and identity grounded in everyday experience that might constrain or enable regional identity-making. Discussion of the potential for and constraints on regionalisation from 'below' and the role of civil society opened up critical questions about identity and citizenship.

As Godsäter argued in his opening presentation, regional identity-making is one of the main challenges for regional civil society activism. Regional NGO networks are influenced by national identities and interests. At the same time, some identities underlying rights claims might be more conducive to regional mobilisation and identity than others. Regional mobilisation and exchanges may give rise to a sense of shared denial of rights, and provide opportunities for understanding and learning for civil society activists, even those embedded in local grievances and demands. One example of this was the work of the PHM in East Africa, where community organising and participatory research was used to promote regional health rights.<sup>32</sup> The relative success of the network depended on access to human and financial resources through key activists and academic institutions.

In other words, local sites of identity and citizenship can be simultaneously local and non-local. Networks focusing on the right to health and access to treatment can create a sense of collective identity around living with HIV/AIDS. Likewise, campaigns about LGBT rights have the potential to mobilise at different geographical levels and, in so doing, support local and national struggles over such issues. However, experiences from South Africa pointed to how identities intersect and, in the case of LGBT rights, can play out both as conflict and as a basis for solidarity networks. In Johannesburg, conflicts arose over the meaning and symbolism of the Pride Parade. The parade was criticised for increasingly representing the social and legal issues of a privileged gay elite and render invisible other experiences of social, economic and political oppression experienced by a majority of lesbian and gay people in South Africa.<sup>33</sup>

Yet, LGBT rights may be an issue that enables civil society activism to transcend local and national borders and, based on shared experience and identi-

ties, to mobilise in a regional and global political arena. With the current wave of legislation against LGBT rights in many African countries, such regional and global networks can play a critical role. One such organization is the Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL) which now has member organizations in West- East- and Southern Africa.<sup>34</sup> If successful, civil society actors can use the regional space to put pressure on national and local governments. However, a major challenge is that states do not necessarily have to adhere to regional decisions and regional bodies have limited mechanisms in relation to member states.

Localised identities are sometimes seen as detrimental to efforts to scale up mobilisation to national and regional levels (Dahlman 2009; Nyamnjoh 2014).<sup>35</sup> However, different identities can intersect and work in and through, for instance, informal networks and associations in ways that transcend local identities and build networks based on other dimensions of actors' identities. These can link apparently local identities and citizenship struggles in other cities, nations and regions. The latter dimension of translocal agency and identity is also made possible by new communication technologies and social media platforms that construct certain representations of protests and make these narratives and imaginaries available to residents elsewhere.<sup>36</sup>

Another less visible but potentially important example of regionalising from below can be found among informal traders moving between cities across borders, who build upon local identities from their home towns or villages while simultaneously being part of urban markets where they join forces with other traders to struggle against eviction from trading places, for instance.<sup>37</sup> These informal regional networks do not necessarily overlap coherently with recognised regional economic and political territories. Thus, such regionalisation from below might challenge and be different from what is understood to be a region by regional governing bodies such as ECOWAS, SADC and EAC.

---

34. Discussed by Cirolia and Scheepers.

35. See Nyamnjoh, F. B., and I. Brudvig, 2014.

36. Discussed by Geuder, Iheduru and Obadare

37. Discussed by Brown and Kinyanjui

---

32. Discussed by Bukonya

33. Discussed by Cirolia and Scheepers.

## Concluding discussion

The summaries in this report reflect some of the complex relationships between civil society and regionalism in sub-Saharan Africa. Our deliberations involved not just the political opportunities for, and constraints on, civil society in influencing regional decision-making, but also the regional character of civil society itself. We discussed difficult questions of collective identity, political representation, accountability and exclusion, and the extent to which civil society can influence states and regional institutions and inform a transformative people-centred regional agenda.

One major issue in our deliberations was the different forms of identity production and the politics of identity-making.<sup>38</sup> While regional institutions provide political opportunities that may also impact national and local politics, it is difficult to forge regional identities. This can reflect persistent currents of nationalism and state-led interests underlying regional integration, but is also fuelled by global transformation. A persistent question throughout the discussions was therefore the benefits of regional decision-making and, more broadly, what we mean by region. Some participants argued that we need to explore what kind of action is best suited to the regional level. There are pulls in the other direction, requiring the decentralisation of sites of engagement in ways that bring decision-making closer to citizens' everyday lives. So, and connected with the difficulty in forging regional identities, what value does regional integration have? The hegemonic neoliberal narrative on regional governance takes political and economic integration for granted, and also assumes that this happens easily within naturalised regions defined by existing institutions. This assumption is also perhaps too common in research and policy. But regionalisation might not be good for all things, and linking regional and local issues is a challenging task for civil society as well as state institutions that also pursue national interests in their transnational relations.

Furthermore, regions and borders are produced by actors in particular ways with particular inter-

ests, and different actors will have different understandings of a region. In this sense, established borders provide both opportunities and constraints. Borders delineate those who are inside and outside, and there is limited acknowledgment of how voices and actors are excluded through such borders within the regional institutions. At the same time, informal networks and actors that do not fit the professionalised NGO characteristics and perhaps do not have a regional vision, might nonetheless engage in regionalising without being aware of what they are doing. This might be true of informal cross-border city networks that link cities and citizens within the region through fluid mobility patterns. Obadare's notion 'accidental regionalism' fits these processes well.

The presentations also revealed the multiscalar character of CSOs and various activities. While well-resourced organisations do engage with regional institutions, they also work at national and local levels. Organisations like WANEP combine regional policy and advocacy with strengthening national and local capacities to facilitate more bottom-up approaches to peacebuilding in the region. The latter requires integrating multiple local actors and voices. Networks such as REPAOC and WACSI focus on capacity-building initiatives but also research and analysis of key developmental issues important to their member networks. SAT engages in different modes of knowledge production and links daily realities with key regional policy issues such as trade and infrastructure development. These examples also point to the multi-layered nature of CSOs, in the sense that they engage in all these activities simultaneously.

The debates also raised critical questions about representation and voice. While there is no doubt many CSOs play important political roles in regional institutions, there are dangers of being co-opted into processes and giving a semblance of popular legitimacy to agendas driven by regional institutions and member states. For many workshop participants, the overall objective was to contribute to people-centred and pro-poor regional development agendas as an alternative to persistent market-led regional integration processes under neoliberal globalisation. This will require that more voices be heard at the regional level, and that civil society

---

38. This section is based on a summary by Ilda Lindell of some of the main issues and tensions that emerged the first day of the workshop. These issues stayed with us for the second day as well and are useful starting points for drawing some main reflections and conclusions.

pushes for more transformative agendas. A major obstacle is that some issues are less 'critical' and less threatening than others and can be more easily supported and voiced at the regional level. Also, many pointed to the weak or missing linkages between regional actors and grassroots mobilisation, and the question arose whether NGOs can, or even should, represent the grassroots? It might be that grassroots mobilisation – including recent urban riots – arises from the experience of being excluded from spaces in which better resourced CSOs are able to operate, and strengthens perceptions of not being heard.<sup>39</sup>

A key tension is thus deciding what is legitimate, meaning both who are recognised as actors allowed to engage by states and regional bodies, which regulate NGOs through registration, for instance, but also the definition of what issues are important and which voices are raised in a regional arena. In short, who decides the sites of engagement? At the regional level, it seems this is defined by regional institutions through, for instance, the access mechanisms described by Iheduru in his presentation. Mainstream NGOs within recognised development agendas are included more than critical actors who challenge what they perceive to be neoliberal, market-driven regional integration. Also, the private sector seems to play a more powerful role in driving regional integration. Even where civil society has been able to challenge states by, for instance, taking human rights issues to regional courts, states can simply ignore these rulings without fear of repercussions. In the peace and security sector, civil society engagement seems to have been more positive: networks such as WANEP play important roles in linking local and regional activities and organisations while simultaneously engaging strategically with national and regional institutions. However, the major challenge remains that regional institutions define the spaces to which civil society is invited. This means that policy-making at more substantive levels takes place with limited or no insights from civil society.

So what is the power of civil society in trying to shift the vision and strategies of regional institutions towards a more people-centred agenda? There are contradictory experiences of how influential civil society can be at the regional level. Much depends on the regional dynamics, access to resources and the sectors in which CSOs are active. Their influence is affected by the power relations and differen-

tiations that we discussed at the workshop and have teased out in this report. Thus, professional NGOs, even when they criticise neoliberal agendas in their advocacy work, do have some capacity to provide policy advice and engage in knowledge production. They also have some power to shape regional governance and achieve important political objectives, without necessarily being able to challenge the broader structural and ideological driving forces behind regional integration.

In exploring the circumstances under which civil society activism can succeed at the regional level, we must be clear about what we mean by success (whether changing policies, informing some processes or pushing for more substantive transformation within regions). Moyo argued in his presentation that we have to assess these initiatives in terms of their effect on poverty in the region. Iheduru argued that a critical factor in the relative success and failure of civil society is the nature and working of the access mechanisms defined by the regional institutions. If so, research should explore more carefully which access mechanisms can lead to better CSO policy effectiveness – provided that informing and shaping policy agendas (with the aim of bringing them closer to pro-poor or people-centred development) is a critical objective of regional engagement.

As described above, the linkage to grassroots and multiple voices is a critical issue. This highlights the question of the extent to which CSOs able to engage regional spaces emerge indirectly or directly from external interventions or from existing networks and collective practices within African societies. Regardless of origin, it is critical that organised civil society allow for and work strategically with the poor through feedback mechanisms that can allow information to be disseminated and for these voices to shape objectives, strategies and practices.<sup>40</sup> Transnational networks with some capacity can focus more on important social issues and use new communication technologies to link to local struggles and through that also construct regional identities.<sup>41</sup>

The dynamics of regionalisation teased out above also reflect broader contestation over the (re) construction and sites of social citizenship. There are limits to the capacity of regional institutions to provide and enforce rights and welfare.<sup>42</sup> Statist reg-

39. Obadare argued that violence can be triggered in contexts where a professionalised civil society is seen as detached from the daily realities of citizens.

40. Discussed by Moyo

41. Conclusion by Iheduru

42. A main conclusion by Iheduru



ulations and national interests have not been overcome in this regard, as we saw with efforts to secure welfare rights for Southern Africa migrant workers. In one of our discussions, reference was made to Latin America, where regional social summits have been more successful. It was felt that African regions should learn from these experiences in moving towards people-centred regional integration.

### **Research agendas on civil society and (insurgent/accidental) regionalism**

The workshop raised more new questions than it answered in the sense that we started exploring key tensions in regionalisation and civil society in Africa, which need more research to be fully understood.<sup>43</sup> The workshop prompted a conversation in which critical perspectives on civil society actors were evident, but also constructive dialogue with NGO participants who negotiate such contestation daily as they seek to build capacity and engage in advocacy from the local to the regional scale. While the dialogue was sometimes difficult, it was constructive and necessary if we are to understand how and under what circumstances civic agency and civil society activism develops regional and transnational networks.

The workshop identified research agendas on civil society and regionalisation. More research is needed into the diversity of informal networks and relations in trade interactions across borders. Moreover, we need to explore in greater depth the extent to which urban protests across regions (and the continent) are informed by one another and are also informally or formally linked to regional networks and relations. Although important research has been done on the role of civil society in regional governance in some African regions, more work is still needed to unpack the complex power dynamics between regional institutions, states and civil society networks in the context of neoliberal globalisation. This is important if we are to understand the alternatives that might emerge and challenge the hegemonic position of neoliberal regional governance, in which a particular model of regional integration is taken for granted. Some see civil society as critical in promoting more transformative regional agendas as counter-hegemonic struggles (Scholte 2014). However, what exactly is alternative regionalism? What alternatives are being promoted by whom? It is important that we unpack these issues to avoid

reducing all regional civil society actors to either co-opted legitimators of the status quo or voices of a singular radical alternative.

An innovative research agenda on regionalism, regionalisation and civil society could be built on three dialogues. First, we need a dialogue between and within African civil societies. While the professionalised civil society sector does commendable work of political importance, the divide between it and other modes of organising and action raise difficult questions about voice, legitimacy, accountability and representation when efforts are made to scale up political struggles. How can we bridge gaps within a fragmented CSO sector and bring everyday experiences into closer dialogues with the NGO sector and lift these more explicitly on the regional agenda? Second, we must build and strengthen the dialogue between researchers, civil society and policy-makers. Finally, we need dialogue between researchers from different academic fields who share an interest in challenging state-centric understandings of regional integration and seek to bridge dichotomies such as top-down and bottom-up understandings of regionalism.

---

43. See also Godsäter, 2013

## References

- Chatterje, P. 2006. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cornwall, A. 2002. *Locating Citizen Participation*. *IDS Bulletin* 33(2): 49–58.
- Council for Africa/Fellesrådet for Afrika 2012. *Afrikas 99 % – økonomisk vekst, ulikhet og protest*. Oslo: Fellesrådet for Afrika.
- Dahlman, C. T. 2009. Regionalism. In C. Gallaher, C. T. Dahlman, M. Gilmartin, A. Mountz and P. Shirlow. *Key Concepts in Political Geography*, pp. 210–22. London: Sage.
- Fioramonti, Lorenzo (2014). *The Role of Civil Society in (re)Shaping World Regions*. In Fioramonti, L. (ed). *Civil Society and World Regions. How Citizens are Reshaping Regional Governance in Times of Crisis*. Plymouth: Lexington Books.
- Godsäter, A. 2013. *Civil Society Regionalization in Southern Africa. The Case of Trade and HIV/AIDS*. Doctoral Dissertation in Peace and Development Research, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg. 269 p.
- Mamdani, M. 1996. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Murray, W.E. 2006. *Geographies of Globalization*. Routledge Contemporary Human Geography Series. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Nyamnjoh, F.B., and I. Brudvig. 2014. *Conviviality and the Boundaries of Citizenship in Urban Africa*. In S. Parnell and S. Oldfield (eds). *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South*. London: Routledge.
- Obadare, E. and W. Williams. 2014. *Civic Agency in Africa. Arts or Resistance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Suffolk: James Currey
- Scholte, J.A. 2000. *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*. Palgrave: Basingstoke.
- Scholte, J.A. 2014. *Civil Society and the Reinvention of Regions*. In L. Fioramonti (ed.). *Civil Society and World Regions. How Citizens are Reshaping Regional Governance in Times of Crisis*, pp. 11–32. Plymouth: Lexington Books.

## Appendix 1: Participants and titles of papers

	<b>Institutions/names</b>	<b>Contact information</b>	<b>Title of presentation</b>
1	Andreas Godsäter Senior Lecturer School of Global Studies Gothenburg University Sweden	andreas.godsater@globalstudies.gu.se	Civil society regionalization in Eastern and Southern Africa
2	Ebenezer Obadare Associate Professor Department of Sociology University of Kansas USA	obadare@ku.edu	The Arab Spring and After: Understanding the Changing Terrain of Civic Mobilization in Africa
3	Okey Iheduru Professor School of Politics and Global Studies Arizona State University USA	Okechukwu.Iheduru@asu.edu	Regionalizing African Civil Society: Lessons, Opportunities and Constraints of Reshaping Regional Governance from Below
4	Alison Brown Professor Urban Planning and International Development Cardiff University	BrownAM@cardiff.ac.uk	Going Global – Weaving Transnational Livelihoods
5	Jacob Geuder Research fellow/PhD Centre for African Studies University of Basel	jacob.geuder@stud.unibas.ch	Images of Movements: The Art of Resistance and its Representation in Videos of Protests
6	Liza Cirolia Researcher African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town	lizacirolia@gmail.com	Collective Identity, Collective Action: Exploring the potential of new geographies of citizenship in civil society movements in South Africa
7	Ella Scheepers, Programme Officer Open Society Foundation South Africa	ella.scheepers02@gmail.com	
8	Mary Njeri Kinyanjui, Institute of Development Studies University of Nairobi	mkinyanjui@uonbi.ac.ke	Ubuntu Business Circles in African Indigenous Markets in Nairobi: Towards the evolution of an African metropolis
9	Gabriel Tati Associate Professor Department of Statistics and Population Studies University of the Western Cape	gtati@uwc.ac.za	The struggle for access to deferred pension and occupational compensation benefits among former and current mine migrant workers: from fragmented to coordinated associational actions within the Southern African region
10	Lena Fält, Research fellow/PhD Department of Human Geography University of Stockholm	lena.falt@humangeo.su.se	Multiscalar struggle for inclusive cities – the case of Tanzania Urban Poor Federation

11	Ingvild Skage Research fellow/PhD Department of Comparative Politics University of Bergen	Ingvild.Skage@isp.uib.no	Social movements, political parties, and patronage in Nairobi – mobilization of street vendors and slum-dwellers from the grassroots via international partners to electoral politics
12	Atunga Atuti East African School of Human Rights/ Centre for Human Rights and Peace University of Nairobi	eajournal@email.com	Focus: civil society and deepening of people to people regional integration in Eastern Africa/EAC: Opportunities and constraints
13	Morris Odhiambo, Consultant, Kitua Cha Katiba/ Chair, East Africa Civil Society Organisations' Forum, Kenya Chapter.	odhotiato@gmail.com	The East African Civil Society Organisations' Forum and Regionalization of civil society in East-Africa
14	Guy Aho Tette Benissan Regional Coordinator REPAOC	guy@repaoc.org	Lessons from dialogue among civil society actors, role of REPAOC as a network in West Africa
15	Denis Joseph Bukenya People's Health Movement of Uganda	denisbukenya@gmail.com	Renewed popular mobilization and urban protests in a regional perspective
16	Bhekinkosi Moyo Executive Director Southern Africa Trust	bmoyo@southernafricatrust.org	In search of a regional portability mechanism for social security in Southern Africa: A case of alliances and networks in creating a regional identity
17	Alimou Diallo West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Ghana	adiallo@wanep.org	Regionalizing Local Issues and Localising Regional Issues: The WANEP Peacebuilding Experience
18	Omolara Balogun West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) Ghana	balogun.omolara@yahoo.com	Organiser/discussant
19	Marianne Millstein Senior Researcher Nordic Africa Institute Sweden	marianne.millstein@nai.uu.se	Organiser/discussant
20	Ilda Lindell Department of Human Geography University of Stockholm Sweden	ilda.lindell@humangeo.su.se	Organiser/discussant
21	Anders Sjögren Senior Researcher Nordic Africa Institute Sweden	anders.sjogren@nai.uu.se	Discussant
22	Ulrika Trovalla Senior Researcher Nordic Africa Institute Sweden	ulrika.trovalla@nai.uu.se	

- 23** Erik Trovalla                      eric.trovalla@nai.uu.se  
Senior Researcher  
Nordic Africa Institute  
Sweden
- 24** Lennert Jongh                      lennert.jongh@humangeo.su.se  
PhD Student  
Stockholm University  
Dep. of Human Geography
-

## Appendix 2: Concept Note and Call for Papers

### Regionalising African Civil Societies Lessons, Opportunities and Constraints

The workshop is part of a Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)-funded program at the Nordic Africa Institute, focusing on various aspects of regionalisation processes in Africa. The workshop is organised in partnership with the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI). An important aspect of the program is to explore ways in which research, policy and practice can be mutually engaging. The workshop will therefore bring together researchers, civil society actors, donors and policy-makers in Nordic and African countries to engage in critical dialogues around an important but often neglected aspect of ongoing regional processes in Africa.

#### Focus of the workshop:

There is a significant trend where civil society actors (such as NGOs, social movements and workers' organisations) originating in Africa establish networks across the continent. Among others, such networks have a role to play in relation to the AU and RECs. However, little is known about these networks.

Africa's civil societies are not only growing in number and diversifying in form and focus; they are also internationalising by creating organisations and networks across national and regional borders. These networks include very different civil society actors informed by existing traditions with voluntary associations in African societies, NGOs with local, national and international connections, and grassroots organisations and movements working with issues such as the informal economy and trade, service delivery, and gender. These regional civil societies are potentially relevant in a number of ways, which require investigation: a) Firstly, regional networks may strengthen civil society organisations in their role of holding national and local governments accountable and democratic; b) Secondly, they have a role to play in representing the grassroots in relation to regional bodies such as AU and RECs, in monitoring policy-making at the regional level and ensuring a degree of accountability by regional governing bodies; c) Thirdly, civil society networks may facilitate collaboration, solidarity and sometimes the movements of members across countries, and in some cases work actively against

rising xenophobia. Regional civil society networks thus potentially have relevance for political and social development in the region.

In spite of much writing about civil society in Africa, little is known about its regional dimensions. A range of issues warrant investigation: What interests do regional civil society networks represent? What can they accomplish that civil society organisations bound by local or national borders cannot and what challenges do they face? When do they become progressive forces able to exert effective influence on governing powers at various levels? Are there possible negative effects of regionalisation of civil societies, such as increasing professionalisation that might weaken the local and national embeddedness of civil society actors? What factors lead to/necessitate the formation of networks and what sustains them?

These questions open up numerous avenues for this workshop. NAI has a specific interest in pursuing some of these issues within an urban framing and issues such as urban mobilisation and protests. We hope to be able to explore three themes related to different forms of rights:

- Opportunities and constraints for regional civil society networks working with democratisation and human rights issues
- Workers' rights and worker organisations' networks
- Renewed popular mobilisation and urban protests in a regional perspective

Regionalisation of civil society concerns not only linkages 'upwards' to regional/continental/international institutions, but also 'downwards' to multiple expressions of urban protests. Civil society networks such as regional NGO networks and organised social movements and trade unions can play crucial roles in regional and continental bodies, but also link with the many expressions of (urban) protests and mobilisation. But while the protests may draw symbolically on events elsewhere in the region, continent or worldwide, they are perhaps less organised and linked to these existing networks and organised civil society.

Based on these observations, we have formulated a Call for Papers to be circulated through our networks.

### **Call for Papers: Regionalising African Civil Society: Lessons, Opportunities and Constraints**

Africa's civil societies are not only growing and diversifying but are also internationalising by creating organisations and networks across national borders. There is a significant trend whereby civil society organisations originating in Africa establish networks across (and beyond) the continent. These networks and the actors within them vary considerably in terms of their structure, the interests that drive them and their links to eventual constituencies. They may include both better-resourced (and influential) local and national NGOs and regional NGO networks, as well as local and transnationally coalescing grassroots initiatives drawing upon existing experience with voluntary associations in African societies. These actors and networks often have their bases in urban areas and thus are informed by local urban conditions, histories and political cultures. Many transnational networks emerge from urban residents' experiences and everyday struggles in local contexts. They may pursue broader issues of democracy as well as social justice agendas, for example, claiming greater access to (urban) resources, livelihoods or 'decent work'. At the same time, we are witnessing the growing frequency of urban protests and various localised expressions of urban discontent as seemingly separate from the above internationalising dynamics.

Simultaneously, place-based and territorially unbound transnational civil society networks thus contribute to a complex politics played out at multiple levels, where the intersection of struggles/processes at local urban and regional/transnational levels are poorly understood. More generally, in spite of much writing about civil societies in Africa, very little is

known about such networks, their dynamics and political implications. The following are examples of relevant issues to be explored at the workshop:

- What governing powers do transnational civil society networks engage with? What are the opportunities and constraints for their engagement with regional and international institutions? Which networks and actors occupy the spaces of engagement at the regional level and which are crowded out or excluded?
- Are there possible tensions between NGO networks and more grassroots based mobilisations, or can they be mutually strengthening/empowering?
- How do regional networks form and how are they sustained? What interests and constituencies do these networks seek or claim to represent? What issues pertaining to representation and participation emerge? What power relations are at work, even in seemingly less hierarchical networks?
- What practices of solidarity, collaboration and learning occur as experienced by participants/urban dwellers in these networks? How are their identities and aspirations changed, and with what political implications?
- How do transnational and trans-regional civil society networks relate to various local mobilisations and struggles at the urban scale? Not least, how do they relate to many expressions of urban protest occurring throughout the continent, following the Arab 'spring'? While these protests may draw symbolically on events elsewhere in the region, continent or worldwide, are they disconnected from existing networks and organised civil societies?

## Appendix 3: Programme

### Regionalising African Civil Societies: Lessons, opportunities and constraints

Venue: Nordic Africa Institute, Villavägen 6, Uppsala

Contact: Marianne Millstein, Nordic Africa Institute, cellphone +46701679665

#### Programme

Thursday October 30

08.30 – 09.00 Registration/Coffee

09.00 – 09.45 Welcome and presentation. Introduction to workshop (Marianne Millstein)

09.45 – 10.30 **Andreas Godsäter:** Civil society regionalisation in Eastern and Southern Africa

10.30 – 10.45 Coffee

10.45 – 12.45 Civil society activism and regional institutions in Southern and Eastern Africa.  
Paper presentations:

**Atunga Atuti:** Civil society and regional integration in Eastern Africa

**Morris Odhiambo:** The East African Civil Society Organisations Forum and Regionalisation of civil society in East Africa

**Gabriel Tati:** Regionalisation of mineworkers' associations in the Southern African Region

**Bhekinkosi Moyo:** In search of a regional portability mechanism for social security in Southern Africa: A case of alliances and networks in creating a regional identity

*Chair: Anders Sjögren, Nordic Africa Institute*

12.45 – 14.00 Lunch

14.00 – 14.45 **Okey Iheduru:** Regionalising African Civil Society: Lessons, Opportunities and Constraints of Reshaping Regional Governance from Below

14.45 – 15.45 Civil society activism and regional institutions in West Africa. Paper presentations:

**Guy Aho Tette Benissan:** Lessons from dialogues among civil society actors and the role of REPAOC as a network in West Africa

**Alimou Diallo** Regionalising Local Issues and Localising Regional Issues: The WANEP Peacebuilding Experience

*Chair: Omolara Balogun (WACSI)*

15.45 – 16.00 Coffee break

16.00 – 17.30 Summary discussion day 1.

*Chair: Ilda Lindell, Stockholm University*



Friday October 31

08.30 – 09.00 Coffee

09.00 – 09.45 **Ebenezer Obadare:** The Arab Spring and After: Understanding the Changing Terrain of Civic Mobilisation in Africa

09.45 – 12.15 Everyday (urban) struggles and transnational networks and relations. Paper presentations:

**Jacob Geuder:** Images of movements: the art of resistance and its representation in videos of protest

**Denis Joseph Bukenya:** Renewed popular mobilisation and urban protests in a regional perspective

**Liza Cirolia and Ella Scheepers:** Collective identity, collective action: exploring the potential of new geographies of citizenship in civil society movements in South Africa

*Chair: Ella Scheepers, Open Society Foundation South Africa*

12.15 – 13.15 Lunch

13.15 – 14.45 Everyday (urban) struggles and transnational networks and relations. Paper presentations:

**Ingvild Skage:** Social movements, political parties and patronage in Nairobi: mobilisation of street vendors and slum dwellers from the grassroots, via international partners, to electoral politics

**Alison Brown:** Going global – Weaving transnational livelihoods

**Mary Njeri Kinyanjui:** Ubuntu Business circles in African indigenous Markets in Nairobi: Towards the evolution of the African metropolis

*Chair: Ilda Lindell, Stockholm University*

14.45 – 15.00 Coffee

15.00 – 16.30 Summary and way forward (research, collaboration, policy)

*Chair: Marianne Millstein, Nordic Africa Institute*





