Engaging Citizens in Democratic Governance

TrustAfrica works to secure the conditions for democracy by strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations and by ensuring that citizens are fully engaged in governance processes—not just in their respective countries but also at the regional level. We believe that an active citizenry is an essential part of a prospering, sustainable, and democratic society and that citizenship goes beyond participating in elections. To hold public officials accountable, citizens need timely access to information about the workings of government as well as the freedom to come together to advocate on their own behalf.

The state, in turn, has a duty to honor their concerns and act on them responsibly. Yet in many parts of Africa, nominally democratic regimes exclude, marginalize, or diminish the role of various social and economic groups. They engage citizens in ways that are largely symbolic, rather than allowing for the real and meaningful participation of autonomous and competent actors.

The recent proliferation of civil society organizations in Africa holds great promise for strengthening democracy, but these groups’ efforts often fall short due to lack of coordination, duplication of efforts, competing agendas, perceptions of elitism, and insufficient transparency. The sector is also hampered by poor collaboration among groups working at the national, sub-regional, and continental levels; heavy reliance on northern donors; and institutional weaknesses that make it difficult to recruit and retain skilled staff and to develop medium- and long-term program strategies. Even more troubling is the recent spate of government efforts to proscribe the work of civil society groups through cynical and oppressive regulations.
Strategies

TrustAfrica seeks to build the capacity of civil society organizations to advocate for democratic governance. We support groups and coalitions working to:

- Monitor national policies and processes on key issues including freedom of association, freedom of expression, anti-impunity, access to justice (especially in post-conflict areas), free movement of people, and civic participation in setting development practices; and conduct advocacy actions aimed at securing and safeguarding the right to these freedoms.

- Engage regional institutions such as the African Union to improve the application of democratic norms and standards such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

- Augment the advocacy skills within civil society organizations and increase their access to policy makers. We convene, provide financial support and technical assistance to help organizations in countries with particularly fragile democracies as those in post-conflict countries.

- Improve economic governance processes and frameworks, especially within the extractive industries.

Activities

We are currently implementing four projects within this program area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Partners</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Criminal Justice Fund</td>
<td>MacArthur, Anonymous, Oak Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Humanity United</td>
<td>Strengthen the capacity of human rights-focused civil society organizations to advance international criminal justice and anti-impunity in Africa. Also to ensure that victims of atrocities are adequately compensated and receive support for integration into society.</td>
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<td>Illicit Financial Flows</td>
<td>Ford Foundation</td>
<td>Build an effective, informed and concerted advocacy movement across Africa for accountable economic governance and to stem the tide of illicit financial flows from the continent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>Humanity United</td>
<td>Strengthen civil society organizations that are working to improve governance of natural resources extraction in Liberia.</td>
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<td>ZimAlliance</td>
<td>Wallace Global Fund, Schooner Foundation, Mize Family Trust</td>
<td>Strengthen civil society for peaceful democratic transition in Zimbabwe. Ensure the process of democratization is inclusive of social and economic rights.</td>
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Selected Accomplishments

- Working with the Open Society Foundations, we established the Center for Citizens’ Participation at the African Union, a civil society resource center in Addis Ababa (with a satellite office in Nairobi).

- Carried out analysis on the policies and procedures for regulating civil society organizations and published an influential reference text titled, (Dis)Enabling the Public Sphere: Civil Society Regulations in Africa.

- Contributed towards the emergence of a vibrant and well-connected human rights-focused civil society sector in Liberia and Zimbabwe.