



Terms of Reference for the Regional Civil Society Advisory Group (RCSAG) for Eastern and Southern Africa

Background

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) was established by General Assembly resolution 64/289 of 2 July 2010 on system-wide coherence with the mandate to assist Member States and the United Nations system to progress more effectively and efficiently toward the goal of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

UN Women set up Civil Society Advisory Groups (CSAG) at the global, regional and national levels to build on existing partnerships and increase strategic dialogues with civil society partners. CSAG's formally recognize civil society as one of our most important constituencies and partners - providing a dynamic source for innovative initiatives, ideas and policy perspectives to assist UN Women in achieving its strategic goals. Closely linked is the vital political role played by civil society in advancing shared objectives in promoting women's rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The mandate of the Advisory Groups is grounded in the goals that UN Women was founded upon which include:

1. **The General Assembly** request to the head of the Entity to continue the existing practice of effective consultation with civil society organizations and encourages their meaningful contribution to the work of the Entity (GA/64/289).

2. The **Vision and Action Plan** of the founding Executive Director which states that: *"In recognition of the special relationship I envisage between UN Women and women's organizations, I will be forming an NGO Advisory Group to advise me as Executive Director of UN Women. This will be a body through which NGOs can share their perspectives, expertise and knowledge from the country level and a channel for our ongoing collaboration."*

The centrality of Civil Society to UN Women's mandate is more currently reflected in the **Strategic Plan 2022-2025** which states that:

"UN Women will assist with convening and coordinating relevant partners to ensure that women's organizations contribute to designing, drafting, decision making, implementation and monitoring of national development plans, humanitarian response strategies, sectoral policies and action plans, laws, and funding decisions in accordance with national laws. This includes facilitating dialogues, consultations, and the establishment of nationally- and locally relevant accountability frameworks and forums for women to share their expertise, needs and priorities."

The Regional Office Strategic Note, 2022-25 considers partnerships with civil society groups, particularly women's rights NGOs and activists as integral to the strategy for achieving its results. Therefore, it seeks to strengthen collaboration and improve its allyship with CSOs in the region. At the inaugural meeting of the UN Women's Executive Director, Sima Bahous in March 2022, civil society organizations called for the revival of platforms such as the RCSAG, which previously enhanced the communication and interaction between them and UN Women.

The UN Women Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa based in Nairobi Regional Civil Society Advisory Group provides space for enhancing collaboration between UN Women and civil society.

The **goals** of the CSAG are:

1. To foster strategic dialogue and engagement, with a view of addressing the root causes of gender inequalities and advance goals of gender equality and women's empowerment.
2. To provide a forum to enable mutually beneficial consultations between UN Women and civil society and draw upon the rich and diverse expertise, experience, outreach and networks, perspective and knowledge that civil society can offer on a timely and effective basis.
3. To serve as a consultative forum to agree on regional priorities and develop joint strategies to inform UN women's programmes.

The role and function of the Regional CSAG are to provide:

1. A dual role of being advisor but also advocate on key strategic areas for intervention that will address existing gender inequalities and develop agreed frameworks for engagement and support to inform the work of UN Women at regional level.
2. Inputs to UN Women during the formulation of key strategic documents e.g. the regional Strategic Note, regional programmes and in identification of priority thematic areas for the region.
3. Provide feedback on UN Women's work including how to streamline e.g. through participation at annual retreats and having a dialogue with respective Country Representatives.
4. Insights on the political, social, economic and cultural developments and trends for consideration in UN Women's engagement in the region.
5. Perspectives on regional scenarios and contribute to positions on key issues including for intergovernmental processes.
6. Strategic advice on an advocacy agenda to promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the region.
7. Contributions to the strengthening of UN Women's engagement with civil society at regional and national levels.
8. Support as necessary to UN Women's partnership with civil society, in relevant intergovernmental processes and fora.

Serving in the advisory group is on a voluntary basis. UN Women will cover expenses related to travel by members to Regional-CSAG meetings.

Membership

The R-CSAG membership will be at an institution level and not at the individual level to ensure availability of members for meetings. Institutions will be required to assign a focal person and alternates whom they consider is fit for such a high-level advisory group. Such arrangement is expected to help avoid issue of quorum as it is highly likely that there will always be someone that can step-in in the event the main focal person can't make it to the scheduled meeting.

The Regional-CSAG will consist of 12 members of diverse gender identities representing institutions that are committed to the core values of the United Nations and to the mission of UN Women. The institutions should have a proven track record in their respective fields preferably with strong credentials as gender, development and or women's rights advocates.

Members representing institutions will be drawn from non-governmental organizations, women's rights organizations/ networks/coalitions/movements, community-based

organizations, academia and others working on gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment in diverse sectors. Mostly, the members representing institutions will be drawn from institutions that work on these issues from a regional perspective. RCSAG members will be selected so that they meet the following criteria:

- Organizations that are working on gender equality, women rights and women's empowerment from a regional perspective including but not limited to (1) Women's Economic Empowerment (2) Women in Leadership and Decision Making (3) Ending Violence against Women (4) Promoting women's voices in humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction (5) Gender equality and women's legal rights
- Representatives from community -based organizations who are engaged in regional advocacy or networks promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women
- Representatives from faith-based or traditional leaders' organizations that work on gender equality and women's rights at a regional level
- Representatives from youth-led or youth-focused organizations that work on gender equality and women's rights issues at a regional level
- Representatives from organizations of persons with disabilities (ideally women-led) that work on gender equality, women's rights and disability rights
- Representatives of organizations working with or representing other groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination
- Geographical balance between Eastern and Southern Africa; men and women (ensuring no more than 2/3 of one gender is represented).

Tenure of membership

Institutions will serve for a period of two years. A third of the institutions will serve for a period of three years to ensure continuity. An opt-out clause is included. The criteria on deciding which members will serve for three years will be established by the advisory group itself.

Meetings

The Regional CSAG will endeavor to hold face to face meetings once a year. The venue for the meeting will either be in Nairobi, Kenya or one of the countries with a country CSAG. The meetings in Nairobi will facilitate interaction with UN Women staff in the Regional Office for East and Southern Africa. The meetings in the countries will provide opportunities to link country CSAG and the regional CSAG. In addition to the face-to-face meetings, UN Women will set up mechanisms for regular interaction between the advisory group and UN Women e.g. teleconferences, web-based platforms, etc. The meetings will be convened by UN Women. Initial meetings for the Advisory Group may be held using teleconference/Zoom until funding for CSAG is secured. All meetings will be held in the UN/AUC Official languages (English/French/Portuguese) for the region.

Secretariat

UN Women Regional Office for East and Southern Africa will serve as a secretariat for the advisory group and will ensure that documentation for meetings is circulated in advance and that outcome of meetings is documented and shared with all members of the advisory group.

UN Women will use of web-based platforms to engage a wider group of civil society organizations in the region including sharing relevant information from the regional CSAG.

Selection process

The selection process will be transparent and inclusive done by a committee constituted in consultation with UN Women ESARO.

Selection criteria

1. The nominated Institutions will nominate a qualified focal person to the Regional CSAG
 - At least 5 years of working experience in civil society, in gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment
 - Regional experience in advocating for and promoting gender equality, development and or human rights
 - Thematic expertise in women's economic empowerment, leadership or violence against women or any thematic priority for UN Women in the region
 - Knowledge and understanding of gender issues in the region
 - Experience in engendering policy and legislation frameworks
 - Strong analytical capacity
 - No active engagement in politics to safeguard neutrality of the UN

Other considerations

- The advisory group should have both women and men
- The advisory group should include female youth (using the UN definition of persons aged between 15 and 24)
- The advisory group should include person(s) with disabilities
- Since it is not possible to have all constituencies represented in the advisory group, wherever necessary, opportunities will be there to invite specific persons or experts to the advisory group's meeting
- If there is a gap in expertise after assessing the nominations, the Regional Director can supplement the membership by nominating additional members to fill the gap
- Nominees should be aware that they are representing civil society in this advisory group, not their respective organizations or interests

Nomination process:

- UN Women will circulate the call for nomination including through existing regional and national gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment networks/coalitions, organizations and movements.
- The nominations should include the following: Name of organization and contact details of the organization and contact details of the nominee; a short profile of and description (less than one page) on why the organization would be a suitable candidate for the CSAG.

The deadline for receiving nominations is 23rd September 2022