



## Terms of Reference – Forus Study of Civil Society in Africa

7<sup>th</sup> June 2019

Forus is an innovative global network empowering civil society for effective social change. It gathers 69 National NGO Platforms and 7 Regional Coalitions from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Pacific. In Africa, the Regional Coalitions that are associate members of Forus are: Réseau des Plateformes des ONG de l'Afrique Centrale (REPONGAC), Réseau des Plateformes nationales d'ONG d'Afrique de l'Ouest et du centre (REPAOC) and the Southern Africa Development Community Council of Non-Governmental Organizations (SADC-CNGO).

Forus is recruiting a team of consultants to conduct a **study on the health of the civil society sector in Africa, with a specific focus on the national NGO platforms and the regional coalitions with which it works.**

### 1. Background

This is a **pilot study** that Forus will apply for Africa, with the potential to replicate the study in other continents. The recommendations of the study will enrich Forus' reflection and discussions with its members and partners on the **role and future models of organized civil society**, in the context of the ongoing work to develop Forus' new strategy for 2021-2025, including the pillars related to capacity development and member engagement.

The recommendations of the study will enable Forus, its national and regional members to enhance their usefulness and relevance for the organizations and populations they represent, and thus strengthen their social base and anchoring at the local level. The results of the study will enable Forus to better understand its members and their realities, to refine its model of engagement with members at different levels, and to improve on the long-term the engagement of members of the African continent.

The study will cover all three of the regions that Forus currently covers on the African continent: West Africa, Central Africa and Southern Africa. The focus will be on both the national and regional levels, to understand who the national members and the regional coalitions are, the realities in which they operate and how this affects them and their relationships.

The study includes new aspects compared to previous exercises, including a Results-Oriented Monitoring (ROM) exercise was carried out in 2018-2019 by external consultants to assess progress of Forus' EU-funded project, a mid-term review carried out in 2019 by external consultants, and self-evaluations conducted by Forus' regional coalitions.

Based on these exercises, Forus determined the need for a study to explore underlying factors affecting responsiveness, engagement and collaboration between and with national platform members and regional coalitions. Compared to these previous exercises, the study will have a stronger emphasis on **relational aspects** (assessing relationships between organisations rather than organisations in isolation) and a stronger focus on key aspects such as gender.

## 2. Objectives and study questions

The study focuses on the general health of the members of Forus on the Africa continent, acting as a general "check-up" of the national platforms, and analysing their relevance and the state of relationships between Forus members, regional coalitions and with the Forus secretariat.<sup>1</sup>

The **aim** of the study is therefore two-fold:

- To understand the current issues, pressures and gaps facing the African NGO platforms and regional coalitions in three regions, which are affecting their ability to engage with Forus and each other, and to build effective collaborations
- To identify levers and strategies that Forus can apply in order to strengthen African NGO platforms and regional coalitions, and to sustainably enhance their contribution to and participation in the global network

The study will ask:

1. What is the general health\* of the Forus members (NGO platforms and regional coalitions) as a section of civil society, in the three regions of the African continent? What were the tendencies observed in the civil society space in the last 5-10 years? What other type of networks /coalitions exist in countries and how are the Forus members interacting with them (including as members of other networks)?
2. What are the main external factors affecting the health of civil society? How is the political, social and economic context affecting Forus' members functioning?
3. What factors are affecting the levels of collaboration and engagement:
  - o Of African national platforms with Forus? (in Forus webinars, national projects, advocacy working group on Agenda 2030, etc)
  - o Of regional coalitions with Forus?
  - o Between the regional coalitions and national platforms?

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<sup>1</sup> \*General health broadly includes: Representativeness, Legitimacy, Good governance, Relevance factors, etc.

4. What could drive improved levels of collaboration between the African members and engagement with Forus?
5. What kind of capacity development actions could Forus develop at regional and national levels in Africa in order to strengthen the legitimate /representative platforms and regional coalitions?

### 3. Scope of the study and methodological approach

The study is expected to be largely qualitative, using focus groups and interviews. Forus' members will be the main stakeholders of the data collection process. As many national platforms as possible will be included among the 27 African national platforms that are members of Forus, ensuring a balance in representation (for example, between more established and less established platforms, geographical diversity, etc). External experts on African civil society will also be consulted, as well as institutional partners.

The study will apply a **rigorous analytical framework** to identify factors affecting the activity level and the engagement of national members and regional coalitions with Forus. A critical analysis of the impact of factors external to the platforms and coalitions, including donor-driven processes, and effects related to partners including Forus should be included. The consultants could propose a typology of levels of activity and of engagement with the regional coalitions and Forus. The study will also produce a critical analysis of relationships between the different levels, assessing how national-to-regional collaborations affect engagement with Forus. A mapping of relationships taking account of a power analysis could be considered.

Specific attention will be paid to **less engaged members** and those presenting lower levels of participation in the regional coalitions and with Forus. These members will be identified in advance with regional coalitions of countries to look in more detail. An analysis of the situation (level of activity, representativeness, competition, governance) and future perspectives for the platforms will be carried out, and in some cases an analysis of other existing platforms in the country.

The study will have a **cross-cutting focus on identity-related factors and apply a conflict-sensitive lens**. Key aspects of identities should be analyzed as relevant by the researchers, to unpack how these can affect power relations, trust and collaboration patterns. These identities include:

- Culture: the impact of cultural differences within the African continent, and specifically between the different members within the regional coalitions.
- Gender, age, ethnicity, political affiliation, language (including anglophone vs francophone), etc

Consultants will be expected to collect data from a cross-section of representatives of Forus members, including a diversity of respondents and different levels of seniority. Visits to a minimum of 2 countries per sub-region should be planned in addition to online discussions.

#### 4. Roles and function of the consultants

The **consultants** propose a complete methodology, carry out the study and facilitate webinars to share findings.

The overall piloting of the study is led by the **Forus secretariat**, in close cooperation with the three **regional coalitions**. REPAOC, REPONGAC, and SADC-CNGO will play a key role by providing inputs to the terms of reference, selecting the consultants and working with the consultants. They will guide the consultants in their work with national platforms.

#### 5. Deliverables

- Research report in English and in French addressing the study questions, as well as with recommendations for Forus (divided into global, per region and, when applicable, specific to national contexts). The research report will present:
  - An executive summary
  - An internal/larger version
  - An external/shorter version, to be published in Forus' website
- Methodology as a deliverable from the inception phase, including if relevant: a tool to assess the health of organisations that Forus may be able to use in the future, a model for national-regional-international relationships. Creative ideas from consultants regarding methodological tools will be encouraged.
- Facilitation of two webinars to share findings and provide feedback to national platforms and regional coalitions: one in English and one in French

#### 6. Profile and qualifications of the consultant

Forus is searching for a team of consultants with strong qualitative research skills. Forus encourages mixed teams, including at least one consultant who is African and based in Africa. The consultants will be expected to be aware of their own biases and how these might interact research process, interactions and findings.

- Preferably a postgraduate degree (PhD or MSc) in the field of research, development studies
- Strong understanding of issues related to civil society in Africa, extensive experience working with NGOs and networks active in Africa
- Experience working on networks and partnerships

- Strong qualitative research skills. Experience in field research, online interviews as part of evaluations and research projects
- Skills for intersectional analysis taking account of gender, culture, etc,
- High levels of cultural awareness, sensitivity and capacity for intercultural communication
- Excellent levels of written and spoken English and French. Portuguese desirable.

## 7. Application procedure

The application documents must be submitted no later than 5 August 2019 in electronic format to the following address: [recruitment@forus-international.org](mailto:recruitment@forus-international.org) specifying “Study of civil society in Africa” in the subject line.

The application file should include:

- A detailed and complete Curriculum Vitae for each consultant, including links to similar studies and previous work carried out, and at least 3 references for each consultant
- A proposal for how the work will be carried out, including a detailed methodology highlighting the approach and constraints, the timeframe and calendar for the research
- A detailed budget including fees and activity costs

Applicants should clearly highlight any current or previous working or personal links to Forus members in Africa, as well as any risk around conflict of interest.

Forus’ budget for this study is EUR 35,000

The interviews will take place in September 2019. A bilingual selection panel composed of Forus staff and staff of regional coalitions will conduct interviews.

## 8. Provisional calendar

|                              |                               |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Consultants search           | June to August                |
| Contracting of consultants   | September / October           |
| Inception phase              | October                       |
| Research phase               | November 2019 – February 2020 |
| Research report finalised    | March 2020                    |
| Webinar on research findings | April 2020                    |