

RAO CONVENTION 2006

COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY ORGANISATIONS (RAOs)

October 11 and 12 2006, M-Plaza Hotel, Accra

Preamble

We, the members of the Research and Advocacy Organizations (RAOs) in Ghana, having gathered here at the M-Plaza Hotel in Accra, at the RAO Convention on October 11&12, 2006 on the theme: "Towards Strengthening State-Civil Society Relations", and having deliberated that:

1. The theme of the convention is an acknowledgement of the important role of civil society in the development process.
2. Civil society has gradually moved beyond just providing project based interventions to participating in policy formulation as a basis of improved good governance and enhanced democratic stability.
3. Civil society participation in policy planning processes including Multi-Donor Budget Support (MDBS) framework, is critical for defining the parameters for a mutually beneficial state-civil-society and donor relationship.
4. Even though MDBS is not a perfect system, it has made assistance processes less tedious; at the same time however, many RAOs feel excluded. There is therefore the need to create space to facilitate greater and active CSO participation for effectiveness.
5. The shift from fragmented approaches towards common frameworks and platforms for discourse in a collaborative manner, allows for a focus on critical cross-cutting themes like unemployment, poverty reduction, child and women's rights. This is a direction civil society will continue to engage itself in to strengthen its responsiveness to its constituents.
6. Beyond just debating issues, the move towards strengthening State - CSO relations makes room for strategies that can lead to the development of more enduring and mutually rewarding state-civil society partnership.
7. The current practice of using RAOs as consultants, as contacts for information, or as a demonstration that public consultation has taken place is not good enough. There is a need for the state to involve RAOs more actively in policy processes.

8. The Trust Bill as it stands now has the potential to limit the freedoms and rights of civil society organizations and NGOs in Ghana. Further discussion is therefore needed.
9. The content of the Right to Information Bill should reflect the views of RAOs and all citizens of Ghana, before it is passed into law.

And having also noted the following challenges as facing RAOs:

1. Inability of RAOs to effectively use existing policy and institutional opportunities to ensure that research outcomes are allowed to influence policy, coupled with the unequal relations between RAOs and Government and the low level of official recognition of RAO contribution in the development process.
2. The need for RAOs to identify the critical entry points for state-civil society interaction.
3. The absence of adequate and reliable data and information to promote effective RAOs participation in policy making, implementation and monitoring.
4. The inability of government to tap into the capacities of RAOs in order to enhance their policy and decision-making processes and the undefined and unclear terms of engagement.
5. The lack of freedom of choice and thought of most RAOs to determine the appropriate themes for research and operations outside the agenda set by funding agencies
6. The inability of some RAOs to meet the requirements for ensuring successful and effective participation due to their limited opportunities and capacity.
7. The lack of a regular and sustained platform for interaction among RAOs.
8. The absence of deeper collaboration and exchange of ideas in the light of competition for resources from the same sources.

Do hereby resolve as follows:

- RAOs will explore opportunities for specialization, and promote the establishment of centres of excellence and niches as focal points for information and research required for policy making
- Call for collaborative research and promotion of the exchange ideas for purposes of enhancing a more holistic understanding of the decision making environment
- RAO products must be readily accessible and attractive
- RAOs will diversify sources of income and improve on self-financing

- RAOs must share their knowledge with ordinary citizens in a meaningful manner, utilizing appropriate communication strategies. This is especially relevant in measuring impact and effectiveness and testing the results of RAO research
- In spite of the struggle for resources, all efforts must be made to avoid competition, rivalry and duplication among RAOs
- On gender issues, affirmative action should be supported to ensure that RAO initiatives are gender responsive and promote equality and equity.
- Research work is key to making impact; the data, information and facts available for alternative policy formulation must be generated by RAOs without any biases and prejudices
- Action should be expedited to ensure the enactment of the Right to Information Bill into law
- The Auditor General's Report must be released on a timely and regular basis to enable civil society and the general public to have easy access and engagement
- A formidable and united front should be presented by civil society to engage with and support the government to review the Trust Bill
- GAPVOD should be strengthened to make it more effective
- RAO processes should be based on good ethics, professionalism and the provision of cutting edge information on critical issues
- There must be a more organised way of ensuring regular and effective representation of RAOs interests and positions in policy processes
- State institutions should improve their attitude towards RAOs by working with them as partners
- A comprehensive directory on key issues of policy should be created by NDPC to make data available to all stakeholders
- RAOs should engage the media intensively and positively on their activities.

Institutions represented at the Convention

- ABANTU, ARK, ASDR, AWLA, CDD, CEPA, CSPS, FIDA, FOSDA, IDEG, IEA, ILGS, ISODEC, ISSER, NGND, TWN, WILDAF
- ALFURQUAN, CDYAC, CEDEP, CIAD, CMRF, COPIO, FTG, FFP, HelpAge, MFWA, Mission of Hope, Netright, NGP, PIP, POSDEV, PEF, Pro-Link, RECA, SWAA, TRDS, VBDF, WOMEC, YSEF, NCCE, CUC, Inst. of Adult Education, Focal service, Dept. of Sociology.
- ACTIONAID, SNV, G-RAP/PMT, GTZ-GGP, CARE International,
- DFID, JICA, UNDP
- Office of the President, Minority in Parliament, Parliamentary Centre,
- The media: TV3, 3 FM stations, 16 Newspapers,