

## HOW THE AU AND THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES (RECs) ENGAGE WITH EDUCATION AS A THEME

This research brief is part of the series compiled by the GCE Secretariat to disseminate and present findings and summarized information from the published report entitled, *“In Search for A Place in Implementing the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA)”*. The research was commissioned by GCE to understand how the African Union (AU) and its Regional Economic Communities (RECs) engage with the theme of education, and to identify what spaces and opportunities exist for civil society education groups in Africa to interact with those bodies in the service of more equitable and democratic public education systems on the continent.

This brief specifically looks at how the AU and RECs engage with the theme of Education and the role of civil society in these RECs. The brief focuses on 4 RECs that were covered in the study: The East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).








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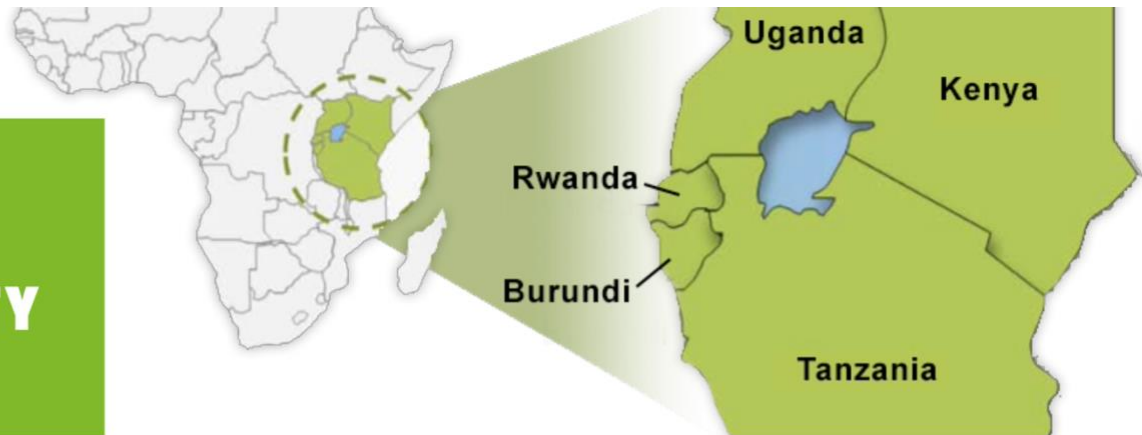
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## AU and the Sub-Saharan RECs at a glance

| UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION   | PROVISIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY   | EDUCATION IN CLUSTER UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION   | ENGAGEMENT WITH EDUCATION   | EDUCATION CSO'S EGAGED   |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| <br><b>AU</b><br><b>ECOSOCC</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Constitutive Act of the African Union and the Abuja Treaty of 1991, which established the African Economic Community, provided for the inclusion of civil society in the programs of the AU.</li> <li>Continental Education Strategy (CESA) underlines "strong partnerships between government, civil society and the private sector," and explains that the mechanism for this is "a coalition of actors."</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education is part of the Human Resources, Science and Technology cluster (HRST), which also includes Youth, Human Resources, Science and Technology.</li> <li>Not an active cluster.</li> <li>ANCEFA and other pan-African education groups do not participate in the cluster.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25)</li> <li>Directorate for Education, Science and Technology (ESTI)</li> <li>Specialized Technical Committee (STC-EST)</li> <li>C10 – Champions of Education</li> <li>CESA Clusters</li> <li>Continental Report (jointly with UNESCO) (first report came out in 2023, next ones planned in 2025 and 2030)</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ANCEFA and FAWE mentioned in the CESA Document</li> <li>ANCEFA has MOU with AUC</li> <li>EI chairs a CESA Cluster; FAWE co-coordinates a cluster; AFEEN coordinates a cluster; 2 INGOs coordinate two more clusters</li> <li>FAWE and ANCEFA invited to the Steering Committee of the Year of Education 2024</li> </ul> |
| <br><b>EAC</b><br><b>EACSOFC</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Article 127 of the EAC Treaty commits to strengthen partnership with civil society and the private sector, to provide a forum for consultations and dialogue with them, and to support the creation of an enabling environment for civil society's participation in the development of the EAC.</li> <li>EAC granted observer status to very few civil society organizations, having set "stringent rules and requirements" for this.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mainstreaming Science and Technology is a thematic priority area for EACSOFC, but it is not clear how this links to education.</li> <li>NECs are not part of any EACSOFC cluster.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education one of the sectoral committees that also includes science, technology, sports and culture</li> <li>Focus on harmonization of curricula and of examination, certification, and accreditation systems</li> <li>Education one of the seven priority sectors that EAC committed to "progressively liberalize" as part of the guaranteed free movement of services between the EAC countries.</li> <li>EAC developed and adopted seven strategic education plans, covering the different education sub-sectors, as part of its "efforts to facilitate the quick integration of the education sector in East Africa".</li> </ul> | None   |
| <br><b>ECCAS</b><br><b>UNKNOWN</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The structure of ECCAS features a Civil Society Unit. However, there is very little information on it.</li> <li>Interest in working with civil society appears to be concentrated in conflict prevention.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education is within the Gender and Human Development Cluster, which is assigned a Commissioner</li> </ul>  | No information   |
| <br><b>ECOWAS</b><br><b>WACSOFC</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Lagos Treaty which established ECOWAS committed to "co-operate with regional non-governmental organisations and voluntary development organisations in order to encourage the involvement of the peoples of the region in the process of economic integration" and to "set up a mechanism for consultation with such organisations."</li> <li>ECOWAS was the first regional economic community in Africa to grant observer status to civil society organizations</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One of WACSOFC's thematic clusters is Entrepreneurship, Youth Employment and Education. This is not an active cluster.</li> <li>NECs in the region do not participate in the cluster.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education sits in ECOWAS's Human Development and Social Affairs Department</li> <li>Decision to establish a specialized Education Agency in West Africa.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ANCEFA, Oxfam and other CSOs engage with the SADC Secretariat on taxation, domestic resource mobilization and education financing.</li> </ul>   |
| <br><b>SADC</b><br><b>SADC-CNGO SATUCC SNCs (SADC National Committees)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Lagos Treaty which established ECOWAS committed to "co-operate with regional non-governmental organisations and voluntary development organisations in order to encourage the involvement of the peoples of the region in the process of economic integration" and to "set up a mechanism for consultation with such organisations."</li> <li>ECOWAS was the first regional economic community in Africa to grant observer status to civil society organizations.</li> <li>Article 23 of the SADC Treaty and subsequent amendments [articles 5(2b) and 16A] commit to work with civil society and non-state actors.</li> <li>Engagement Strategy with Non-State Actors (approved 2022)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual Meeting of Education Ministers (jointly with Ministers responsible for Science and Technology)</li> <li>Education, Science and Technology Strategies and Frameworks</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal engagement of civil society groups with the 2022 Ministers' meeting in Malawi (CSO Position Paper)</li> </ul>  |

# THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY (EAC)



## EAC and Education

The EAC's approach to education is largely a reflection of the Community's focus on economic integration and related trade and investment issues. When speaking of education, the language is suffused with references to its importance for economic development and for meeting technical and business demands of the 21st century, leading to a focus on harmonization of curricula and of examination, certification and accreditation systems, as important factors to facilitate the free movement of human resources in the EAC region.

The mobility of teachers and students is seen as a boon to the free movement of persons across the Partner States as envisaged under the EAC Common Market Protocol. There are no references to CESA in EAC's coverage of education-related topics. Education is also one of the seven priority sectors that EAC committed to "progressively liberalize" as part of the guaranteed free movement of services between the EAC countries (GIZ 2022).

This year, EAC developed and adopted seven strategic education plans, covering the different education sub-sectors, as part of its "efforts to facilitate the quick integration of the education sector in East Africa". At an institutional level, education is included in one of the sectoral committees that also includes science, technology, sports and culture, and would also be connected to a second sectoral committee dealing with gender, youth, children, social protection and community development.

## Engagement with civil society

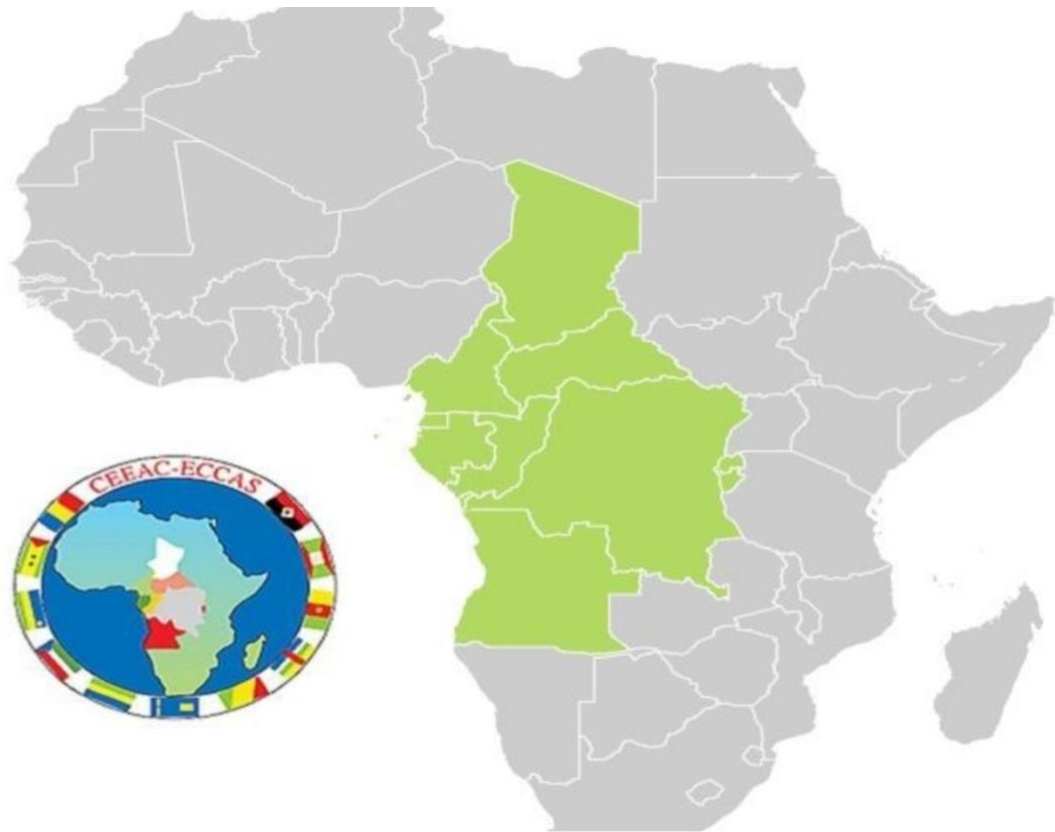
The East African Civil Society Organisations' Forum (EACSOF) was established in 2005 to facilitate the involvement and engagement of CSOs in the region with EAC. It defines itself as "the premier platform organization that brings together civil society organizations in the East Africa region.

Its overall goal is to have an East African Community (EAC) integration process that is inclusive of the voices of East African citizens and responsive to the needs and demands of the people. This is in line with the EAC Treaty which stipulates that regional integration and development in the community shall be people centred and participatory".

EACSOF organizes the Annual Secretary General's Forum, which provides an opportunity for the private sector, CSOs and interested groups to share experiences and lobby the EAC. The forum also discusses issues of governance in the region.

As the mandated regional umbrella organization to act as a focal point and intermediary, EACSOF also engages with EAC's member states on regional policies and processes. There is no updated online information on the kind of engagements it has conducted lately.

# ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF CENTRAL AFRICAN STATES (ECCAS)



## ECCAS and Education

- Assigning a Directorate of its own to education in the earlier structure of ECASS can positively be seen as a statement of intent and a recognition of the importance of the theme. The later clustering of gender and human development in the office of one Commissioner, and placing education within that cluster, continues in the same direction.
- ECASS declared the year 2022 to be the year of Human Development. A recent article by Kapinga Yvette Ngandu, the Commissioner for Gender, Human and Social Development (GHSD), underlined that education is at the heart of all development – economic, social, and environmental- and that armed conflicts, natural disasters and health crises are part of the challenges that undermine societies in the ECASS region – all of which affect the supply, access and maintenance of basic education services.
- The human capital approach is evident in ECASS’s overall emphasis on education as a tool of economic integration, but there is a recognition that education is a fundamental human right and that building resilient education systems is key to providing equitable access to quality education even in times of crises. ECASS declares that the success of its development plans relies on “the transformative force of education, science, and culture”.
- Other indicators of ECASS’s education work can be seen in its joint strategic plan with UNICEF (WCA) (2022–2025), which focuses on three areas of cooperation: “high-quality education that is inclusive and resilient; access to the birth registration services and birth certificates; and the generation and use of data.
- Information about references to CESA in ECCAS’s education-related work could not be located during the research and there is no available information on ECCAS’s GHSD unit engaging with civil society education groups.

# THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS)

## ECOWAS and Education

At the institutional level, the theme of education sits in ECOWAS's Human Development and Social Affairs Department. Initially, Education was in a separate department, together with science and culture. Its merger with the Directorate of Humanitarian and Social Affairs reflects ECOWAS's belief the social and human development pillars that those two Directorates were assigned to build belong to the same category of the enhancement and well-being of ECOWAS.

ECOWAS established a specialized Education Agency in West Africa, in response to the growing educational needs and challenges in ECOWAS. The decision dates to 2017, when the Heads of State and Government adopted the recommendation of the ECOWAS Ministers of Education in this regard. The Agency's primary role is seen as promoting the harmonization of education systems in the ECOWAS Region in areas of governance, curriculum, recognition and equivalence of Certificates, quality assurance, and resource mobilization .

As for concrete cases of civil society engagement, ANCEFA had some engagement with ECOWAS in 2017, when it interacted with the ECOWAS education experts' meeting in Abuja and the Education Ministers' meeting in Lome. ANCEFA also helped the development of the ECOWAS Youth and Girls Engagement Strategy, which culminated in the virtual convening by the ECOWAS HRST Commissioner of a forum on youth skills and TVET opportunities within the ECOWAS zone .

A recent case of collaboration between civil society actors in the region and ECOWAS on issues around the financing of education points out the potential gains that such collaboration could bring to both sides . As countries in the region sought additional resources to address the increased needs of their education systems in the COVID period, civil society groups sensed an opportunity to engage with governments and with ECOWAS on issues around domestic resource mobilization.

An important entry point was provided by Oxfam's Inequality Index, to the Steering Committee of which it had invited representatives of ECOWAS, the Africa Development Bank, the regional civil society umbrella organization WACSO, and others. When the President of Sierra Leone announced in 2018 his plans to make education accessible for everyone, highlighting the challenge of finding the resources to do that, Oxfam engaged and presented ideas centered on optimizing domestic resources, including introducing transfer pricing regulations. Oxfam engaged the Ministry of Finance and others in Sierra Leone to arrive at agreements on the recommended policy actions, framing this within the Inequality Index work. This framing allowed linking the issue of increasing privatization of education in the region with domestic resource mobilization challenges. Interviewees from the civil society side spoke of the receptiveness of ECOWAS to their ideas.

There are no references to CESA on the ECOWAS website. Activities undertaken by ECOWAS in 2022 on Peace Education, for example, thematically connect to CESA's Peace Education Cluster, but ECOWAS is not active in that cluster. Overall, there is little evidence showing ECOWAS engagement in CESA.

## Engagement with Civil Society: The West African Civil Society Forum (WACSO)

- The Lagos Treaty which established ECOWAS stated that the inter-governmental body "shall co-operate with regional non-governmental organisations and voluntary development organisations in order to encourage the involvement of the peoples of the region in the process of economic integration and mobilise their technical, material and financial support. To this end, the Community shall set up a mechanism for consultation with such organisations." ECOWAS was the first regional economic community in Africa to grant observer status to civil society organizations (Reinold 2019).
- The revised 1993 ECOWAS treaty is credited with a shift to a more people-centered agenda. By calling for cooperation with regional CSO and the broad participation of West African citizens in the regional integration process , "an important change in both the structure and character of West African cooperation" occurred (WACSI).
- As early as 1996, by a decision of the Council of Ministers, ECOWAS created the Forum of Associations Recognised by ECOWAS (FARE) as an "apex institution", to bridge the gap between civil society WACSO and WANEP were at one point described as "classic interface models that other regions ought to study and adapt" (Moyo 2007, p.8). The regional umbrella organization model of WACSO has been adopted elsewhere on the continent by other RECs, while WANEP has been brought in by RECs in other regions to help it develop models of civil engagement in conflict prevention and peace and security-related affairs.

- WACSO's current inactivity and struggles with securing funding contrasts with WANEP's continued growth and the niche it has carved out and solidified in the conflict prevention field (OSF 2016). "Enjoying a privileged partnership with, and strong support from ECOWAS, WANEP has become the leading driver of change in peacebuilding operations in Africa," as an external evaluation of WANEP concluded in 2014.

# SOUTHERN AFRICA DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY (SADC)

## SADC and Education

Education in SADC falls under the Social and Human Development Directorate (SHD) of the SADC Secretariat. The Sectoral Ministerial Clusters belonging to SHD are (i) Health and HIV (ii) Youth (iii) Education and Training (ET) and Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) and (iv) Labour and Social Partners.

The ET-STI Ministers' Meeting takes place annually and is supported by an Education Program Officer the SADC Secretariat.

Given the multi-sectoral nature of the issues related to those two areas, Teacher Unions also engage with the Ministerial Cluster on Labour. The implementation of the SADC Protocol on Labour and Employment, which aims for a decent work agenda for all, involves tripartite social dialogue between governments, trade unions (represented at the regional level by SATUCC), and employees (Hulse et. al. 2019). Civil society education groups.

Currently, there are no regional education-focused NSA networks or teacher unions who have MoUs with SADC or who have formalized engagement mechanisms with the ET-STI Ministerial Cluster. Any engagement that has taken place to date, such as at the Malawi meeting in 2022, was on an ad hoc basis and did not secure meaningful engagement for the involved civil society education groups.

As for the Education International (EI)-affiliated teacher unions in the SADC region, they are represented by SATUCC, who has 22 affiliates with a total membership of more than 5 million members in 14 SADC member states. The affiliates are umbrella federations / confederations / congresses of trade unions in different sectors (such as COSATU in South Africa and the Zambia Council of Trade Unions). Teacher Unions can engage with SATUCC through the trade union federations they are members of. There has not been such a recent case of a Teacher Union going through its national umbrella trade union federation to bring issues of concern to SATUCC.

For SATUCC, if the national or regional Teacher Union issues can be classified as falling under the Employment and Labour Cluster (qualifications, status), then they would be able to bring those up in their work with SADC. SATUCC would like to be able to engage on the broad spectrum of social and economic development issues that they see as concerns of theirs and not to be confined to employment and labour issues only.

Outside the privileged umbrella organizations, the Declaration of the 2022 SADC People's Summit, convened by the Southern African People's Solidarity Network (SAPSN) (which Moyo [2022, p.101] considers a striking example of transformist counterforce civil society) devoted a special section to early childhood development (ECD). It called for the inclusion of ECD in SADC's Education and Training Protocol, urged SADC governments to "establish structures and systems for ECD to thrive, especially for providing leadership, infrastructure and training of teachers for this level", and called for the allocation of at least 5% of national budgets to ECD.

SAPSN has no MOU with the SADC Secretariat and is not one of the privileged civil society umbrella organizations. It addresses SADC structures from the outside as it were. And although education is not one of its five thematic areas, the 2022 People's Summit Declaration show that the network is taking up education as a concern and that its members at the country level include civil society education groups who insert education issues into the network's agenda and communications.

The meeting record and the SADC press release showed that CESA did not appear at all in either document. The tentative conclusion to make here is that the development of SADC regional policies and frameworks are not seen to flow from or interact strongly with CESA as a strategy or as a framework.

## Engagement with Civil Society: SADC-CNGO and SATUCC

- In August 2022, the SADC Council of Ministers approved the Regional Non-State Actor (NSA) Engagement Mechanism. The mechanism is now waiting to be operationalized.
- CSOs face difficulties in establishing direct formal relationships with SADC institutions (primarily the Secretariat). Only two of the major regional CSOs [the SADC Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (SADC-CNGO) and SATUCC] have concluded MoUs with the Secretariat, which provide a legal framework for cooperation and gives the CSOs the opportunity to be invited to Ministerial meetings.
- SADC-CNGO and SATUCC, together with the Fellowship of Christian Councils of Southern Africa, a third network with MoU status, form an Apex Alliance with responsibility for organizing an annual Civil Society Forum, which usually takes place before the SADC Summit. According to Hulse et. al. "CSOs feel that the Civil Society Forum does not effectively feed civil society inputs into the Summit decision-making process, in part because they are not adequately informed of the Summit's agenda, and in Alliance's Civil Society forum.
- Even SADC-CNGO has difficulty arranging meetings with the SADC Secretariat, despite being in the same city as the Secretariat.
- Studies conducted by SADC showed that the engagement between SADC and NSAs have a tendency of occurring at the discretion of the Secretariat. Because of the limits of formal access, some CSOs resort to establishing informal relations, which yield results in some cases, but remain highly unreliable.
- "Interaction between CSOs and SADC organs occurs mainly through the SADC Secretariat, yet the real locus of power within SADC is the Council of Ministers and their summit meetings, where CSOs are marginalized." (Reinold, p.7).