



The State of Eritrea



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

**23rd Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of
Senior Officials and Experts (ICSOE)**

ECA Office for Eastern Africa

**Concept Note for the Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting (AEGM):
The State of Social Cohesion in Eastern Africa**

Asmara, Eritrea

05-07 November 2019

I. Background

Social cohesion exists where a group of people interact in a way that advances the interests of all. The concept is gaining prominence in development discourse due to threats to peace and security, enduring poverty and the lack of social rights. Africa is working towards continental integration and a single African market through the AfCFTA, but there is much to be done to enhance continent-wide social cohesion, within and across national borders.

At the February 2016 20th Session of the ICE in Nairobi, Kenya, UNECA launched a report on *Social Cohesion in Eastern Africa*. The report noted rising inequalities and challenges posed by high levels of migration, urbanization and poverty, despite impressive economic growth in the region over the past decade. While Eastern Africa, as a region, was overcoming many challenges, the report emphasized the need for Member States and Regional Economic Communities to mainstream policies that strengthen social cohesion.

The evidence points to social cohesion being under threat. Demographic pressures are putting a strain on scarce resources and Eastern Africa is also one of the fastest urbanizing regions, with associated social pressures and socially corrosive trends. This includes substance abuse (alcohol abuse is nearly double the African average in five countries across the region) and gender-based violence (in the six countries for which there is data, between one third and one half of all women report that they have suffered gender-based violence).

Persistent problems in the efficiency of service delivery can compound social malaise, undermining the quality of education and health provision. These inefficiencies convey a perception that governments could do more. At-risk individuals see their faith in society eroded at the same time as society seems to reject them. Resolving economic and social challenges is part of development, but new solutions and innovative approaches are indispensable to tackle emerging problems such as social exclusion.

II. Objectives of the Session

The expert meeting will take stock of the state of social cohesion and propose solutions to improve it, region-wide. This Session will not seek to find one-size-fits-all solutions. Rather, basing its deliberations on sound research and evidence-based proposals, the discussion will seek the broad lines of effective approaches to achieving greater social cohesion.

The session will present findings from a forthcoming ECA report assessing the state of social cohesion in Eastern Africa and discuss the benefits of greater social cohesion at the national and regional levels, drawing on examples of best practice both from within the region and elsewhere.

The following questions will be considered:

- a) What do studies reveal about the **impact of social cohesion** on national/regional development?
- b) How can stakeholders partner to support **social cohesion policy initiatives**?
- c) What **examples of good practice** can be scaled-up?
- d) How can we strengthen **awareness about the importance of social cohesion**?

III. Format of the Meeting

This will be one of the parallel sessions on Wednesday 06 November 2019, 13:30 – 17:30.

Presentations by:

- **Emelang Leteane**, Social Affairs Expert, ECA Office for Eastern Africa
- **Timothy Murithi**, ECA Consultant on Social Cohesion
- **Christopher Louise**, Senior Adviser, Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD)
- **Paul Kamau**, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi
- **Lanoi Maloiy**, Researcher and Lecturer, African Women Studies Centre, University of Nairobi
- **George Mukundi Wachira**, CEO, Maendeleo Group.

IV. Participation

Experts from Eastern African countries and representatives of RECs, IGOs and other relevant institutions will join in the discussion. Ms. Emelang Leteane at leteane.uneca@un.org can provide further information and clarification, as well as registering participation in the session.

V. Supporting Documents

Acket, S. et al. (2011). **Measuring and validating social cohesion: a bottom-up approach**. Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research. Working Paper No 2011-08. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/dev/pgd/46839973.pdf>

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EAC Secretariat. (2013). **EAC Social Development Policy Framework**. Available at: <http://www.eacsof.net/upload/EAC%20SOCIAL%20DEVELOPMENT%20FRAMEWORK.pdf>

Jenson, J. (2010). **Defining and measuring social cohesion**. Commonwealth Secretariat and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. Available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/151856/Jenson%20ebook.pdf>

Karbo, T. (2013). **Religion and social cohesion in Ethiopia**. International Journal of Peace and Development Studies. Available at: <https://dmeformpeace.org/sites/default/files/Project-Report-Social-Cohesion-and-Community-Based-Protection-Sep-1-2014.pdf>

OECD. (2012). **Perspectives on Global Development 2012: Social Cohesion in a Shifting World**. OECD Publishing.

Oucho, L.A & Williams, D.A (nd) **Challenges and solutions to migrant integration, diversity and social cohesion in Africa**. Available at: https://www.wider.unu.edu/sites/default/files/OUCHO%2C%20Linda%20Adhiambo_paper.pdf

UNDP. (2016). **Towards a measurement of social cohesion for Africa**. UNDP Publishing. Available at: https://www.africa.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/UNDP%20Social%20Cohension_web.pdf

UNECA (2016). **Social Cohesion in Eastern Africa**. Sub-Regional Office for Eastern Africa, Kigali. Available at: https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/social_cohesion_in_eastern_africa_fin_eng.pdf