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African Civil Society Engagement

Strategy document



Table of Contents

A.	Background	1
B.	Contextual analysis of challenges to civil society engagement with the achpr	3
C.	Impact of challenges on the enjoyment of human rights	7
D.	Theory of change	9
E.	Ways of working	12
	Table 1.1: Organisational structure	17

A. BACKGROUND

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) is a regional human rights body established by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in 1986. Over time, the African system of protection of human rights, and particularly the ordinary public sessions of the ACHPR, has proven to be valued by civil society organisations as a space where they could give visibility to human rights issues and engage with member states. Civil society organisations have used the system and its procedures to develop innovative soft law standards on a range of human rights issues including socio-economic rights, protection of people living with HIV, and rights of people in extractive industries among others. Collaborations between civil society and the ACHPR also produced standards on contentious issues such as the rights of sexual and gender minorities and sexual and reproductive rights.

However, civil society organisations have also faced significant challenges while engaging with the Commission. These challenges stem from both systemic problems within the ACHPR's operations, and limitations on the part of civil society organisations themselves. The outcome of this has been a general waning of interest

in the use of the ACHPR by African civil society organisations.

For many years, the main platform for civil society engagement at the ACHPR has been the NGO Forum, a 3-day bi-annual human rights conference held during the ACHPR ordinary sessions. The NGO Forum attempts to give visibility to an array of human rights issues and country priorities across the continent.

While the NGO Forum has proven valuable for activities such as submitting resolutions to the ACHPR, it presents challenges as a venue for sustained advocacy. The diversity of interests often means that topics receive only intermittent attention, apart from brief focus groups that convene for an hour over the three days. Consequently, although the NGO Forum is beneficial for general networking, it may not fully support organizations focusing on specific issues, nor does it optimize the limited time these organizations have to collaboratively define a clear working agenda. Its conference format, while effective for exposing participants to selected topics in each session, might not be the most conducive environment for in-depth learning about the regional human rights protection system. Additionally, while the Forum has historically facilitated engagement with Commissioners, it appears that, over time,

the Commissioners have increasingly set the agenda and led the conversations.

It was precisely the outsized role of Commissioners in the discussions held at the NGO Forum that compelled a group of civil society organisations to build an alternative meeting space at the 52nd ACHPR session in Yamoussoukro. These “side events” were hosted by Heartland Alliance later replaced by Synergía, INTERIGHTS later replaced by the Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa (ISLA) and, in partnership over time with other institutions such as Coalition for African Lesbians (CAL), African Men for Sexual Health and Rights (AMSHer), the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria, Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA), Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr), and the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) among others. The goal was to organise some skill building sessions and to avail a physical space for any civil society entity who needed meeting rooms but were excluded from the NGO Forum space.

In 2019, this initiative grew into ‘African Civil Society Engagement’ and ACSE was formally launched. ACSE created a process for the selection of initiatives to be featured in the side event program with priority for

initiatives aimed at strengthening skills on the system and for long-term advocacy projects and offered a platform, through an app, to advertise events and circulate information. Although ACSE’s work began its work by offering alternative space for side events on the margins of the ACHPR sessions, the focus has since expanded from the understanding that advocacy at the commission is not and should not be limited to attending the ACHPR sessions and conducting activities during those periods alone. ACSE’s focus has since expanded to include other work discussed in the theory of change and ways of working sections of this document. In addition, our focus is not limited to ACHPR sessions as we acknowledge that advocacy work does not stop at the sessions.

Currently, ACSE is working to create substantial and substantive engagement between African civil society organisations and the ACHPR by creating a space to incubate ideas on engaging the Commission, to disseminate knowledge and document the process of those ideas, and to provide a platform for capacity building and trainings, including programmatic advocacy by engaging the ACHPR.

ACSE supports civil society organisations to strengthen their capacity on “how things

should be” at the ACHPR: learning about the system, its values, standards, procedures, and mechanisms; and “how things actually are”: learning about the politics and actual relations between various stakeholders, mainly the ACHPR and the AU, member states, and civil society. This will then help civil society organisations who are engaged with ACSE to define and implement a working plan to “fill the gap” as well as to set new targets to ensure full enjoyment in the protection of rights.

Ultimately, ACSE strives to create direct engagement with the practical aspects of the ACHPR’s mechanisms, such as engaging with delays in concluding observations, observer status applications, and more. By doing so, ACSE hopes to overcome the challenges facing civil society engagement with the ACHPR and promote the effective protection and promotion of human rights in Africa.

B. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES TO CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ACHPR

1. Limitations within civil society

a. Information gaps

Many civil society organisations in Africa have a limited understanding of the functioning of the ACHPR as well as its interaction with the other African Union organs. Limited knowledge of the system and how it relates to political organs and states, restricts civil society ability to understand the nature of challenges and to seize opportunities that the system may offer. With regard to opportunities for advocacy with member states, civil society organisations lack information on the selection and appointment of Commissioners and therefore make little to no input on the selection process. There have been very few efforts by civil society at domestic level to propose qualified candidates for consideration by member states.¹ Further, most NGOs

¹ Civil society organisations successfully engaged with the process to push for the appointment of Lawrence Mute. On the other hand, the lack of civil society engagement in the last Kenyan bid to the ACHPR resulted in a very poor candidate.

that participate in Ordinary Sessions of the Commission do not routinely engage with happenings at the ACHPR like the development of the rules of procedure, guidelines on state reporting, and other normative standards like communiques and resolutions. Few organisations even engage with the quasi-judicial arm of the ACHPR to develop human rights standards. Only specific organisations who know about the processes are involved while the broader civil society that attends the NGO forum remain largely uninformed.

b. Limitations in CSO participation

As mentioned earlier, the NGO Forum led by the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS) has functioned as the main space for participation of civil society organisations and the formal mechanism used to interface with the ACHPR. The NGO Forum is commonly perceived as the sole intermediary between civil society organisations and the ACHPR. This significantly limits civil society's ability to carry out advocacy, due to the limitations of the space. Another limitation is in the space organised by the NGO Forum itself: due to concurrent priorities and too many outstanding issues, civil society organisations have limited opportunities to bring their topics to the attention of the plenary, and the discussions tend to be

formal rather than substantive. As a result, civil society organisations are often unable to engage in meaningful dialogue that can have a positive impact on the work of the ACHPR.

Further, few coordinated efforts from civil society organisations to advance progressive agendas at the Commission have come out of engaging within the NGO Forum. The NGO Forum includes at least 17 Special Interest Groups. Although these groups convene to discuss specific issues and occasionally propose resolutions, they do not consistently engage in advocacy efforts, which are essential for shaping influential decisions by the ACHPR and guaranteeing their implementation by all stakeholders, including member states. This illustrates the lack of a clear vision and strategy to improve and strengthen the legal framework for promotion and protection of human rights in Africa. There is rarely a thinking process on how to sustain the discussions post the NGO Forum and how to effectively engage with the Commission on them.

Additionally, the separation lines between the NGO Forum and the Commission have blurred considerably over the years. The NGO Forum routinely partners with the ACHPR on missions to find venues for sessions held outside of the Gambia.

Some members of the Commission attend the panels during the session, and the NGO Forum reads a statement during the opening session of the ACHPR. Because of the submission of resolutions that are drafted within the NGO Forum, many civil society actors are convinced that the ACHPR automatically considers, or even approves, those draft resolutions that have been adopted by the NGO forum; that is not the case, being the NGO Forum resolution adopted by the ACHPR about 5% of the submitted. At face value, the relationship appears to be collaborative and mutually beneficial. However, this collaborative spirit does not stretch to individual NGOs who still have to develop their own relationship with the Commission and Commissioners to advance human rights issues. This is also a result of the structure of the space as a conference with no capacity to carry out long-term advocacy campaigns.

2. Systemic challenges within the ACHPR

a. Lack of transparency within the functioning of the ACHPR

The ACHPR operates in a highly opaque manner that offers few avenues for accountability and oversight. First, there is little transparency around how Commissioners are appointed, which

is one of the main reasons for the poor performance of the Commissioners, their limited understanding of the system itself and their incapacity to protect the Commission from the attacks of hostile member states.

The Communications procedure, a process by which individuals and organisations should be able to submit complaints about human rights violations, is also quite opaque, creating a significant barrier to effective civil society engagement. Many civil society organisations struggle to understand the status of their submissions or the decision-making process within the Commission, partly because of limited access to case lists and the opaqueness of the deliberation process. Without access to case lists, civil society organisations are unable to track the progress of cases or determine which issues are receiving attention from the ACHPR. Such concealment of pertinent information also limits civil society's ability to work together on pending cases where the issues are similar, intervention as *amicus curiae* or to learn from each other's experiences and avoid reinventing the wheel.

Furthermore, there is a lack of clarity on how the ACHPR uses shadow reports and statements submitted by civil society organisations. While the Commission

formally receives such reports and statements, civil society organisations do not always have a clear understanding of how they are used, or the impact they have on the ACHPR's work. Over time it has become clear that in order to ensure that shadow reports are actually considered, a direct engagement with the Commissioners is required. While the new rules of procedures have improved the process for submission of state and shadow reports, as well as the timeline for adoption and publication of concluding observations, it is unclear whether and how the new rules will be implemented. Moreover, the ACHPR has very little capacity to monitor and follow up on the implementation of the concluding observations provided by the Commission.

b. Threats to the Independence of the ACHPR

Over the last years, the ACHPR's independence has come under threat, limiting its efficacy, questioning its authority, and calling into question the political will of the Commission itself to stand by its own standards, criteria, and decisions. Already, the fact that Commissioners are appointed by the African Union Executive Council, which consists of the foreign ministers of each AU member state,

creates the risk of political considerations influencing the process. This can result in the appointment of Commissioners who are not committed to promoting human rights or are influenced by their respective governments. Even when the Commission carries out its role as set out in the African Charter, states are generally unwilling to comply with its decisions (communications, concluding observations), requests (urgent appeals) and standards (including soft law standards). The African Union essentially controls the ACHPR, from funding and budget decisions to staffing, which limits the ACHPR's ability to carry out its mandate.

This power imbalance eventually led to attacks by member states on the ACHPR, culminating with Decision 1015/2018 of the AU Permanent Council² which directly challenged the protective mandate of the ACHPR, and not only questioned the nature of the Commission itself but essentially neutralized its independence. The silence on the part of the ACHPR had the effect of alienating civil society organisations and increasing the control over the Commission's activity by repressive member states. Unfortunately, the ACHPR has remained placative of states even under these conditions, treating states as

² The African Union directed the ACHPR to withdraw observer status for the Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL), citing "African values". The Commission complied, yet the decision to grant the observer status had been made using well established procedures of the ACHPR.

discretionary participants rather than duty-bearing entities. This diplomatic approach to state obligations has emboldened states to use the ACHPR public sessions as a political space, prioritising political considerations over human rights issues. Meanwhile, the most repressive and unaccountable regimes in the continent are getting more effective at dismantling any form of redress, at domestic and supra-national level, including the ACHPR.³

Furthermore, The ACHPR faces significant risks from the proposed African Union reform process. It is vital that these reforms not only preserve but also enhance the protections offered by the ACHPR. The reform proposals under consideration include merging the ACHPR, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), and possibly the African Union Commission on International Law (AUCIL) into a single entity, which could dilute specialized focus and introduce bureaucratic challenges. Another option under consideration advocates for clearly separating the mandates of the ACHPR, ACERWC, and the African Court, leaving only the African Court with the protection mandate. This would eliminate the ability to bring complaints of rights violations before the

ACHPR and ACERWC, thereby weakening accountability mechanisms and creating a fragmented system with potential duplication and communication barriers. Additionally, removing the complaints procedure without expanding access to the African Court could severely affect human rights protection in Africa.

C. IMPACT OF CHALLENGES ON THE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The ACHPR is a crucial institution for the promotion and protection of human rights on the African continent. CSOs play a critical role in this process by providing information and advocating for human rights as well as holding governments accountable when human rights violations occur.

The challenges faced by civil society in engaging with the ACHPR have led to fatigue by civil society organisations and human rights defenders in engaging with the ACHPR. There are fewer groups engaging in ACHPR sessions and even fewer are communicating cases to the mechanism.

³ For example, representatives of Egypt, Ethiopia and Eritrea have previously used obstructionist tactics in the last public session to prevent civil society from taking the floor.

Furthermore, the ACHPR hybrid sessions held since the Covid-19 pandemic and last-minute changes by the ACHPR to make sessions hybrid, have further aggravated low participation of CSO's in ACHPR sessions. Similarly, engagement at the NGO forum has the same faces and limited space for youth and new actors to meaningfully engage with the space.

Since civil society organisations often use the ACHPR mechanisms to seek redress where local institutions fall short, the dysfunctional environment for CSO engagement at the ACHPR creates a situation of limited access to justice, as individuals and groups seek justice for human rights violations.

When human rights violations are not exposed beyond domestic level, it also contributes to continued impunity for human rights violations. There is already an apparent limited ability by the ACHPR to address violation of civil and political rights in context of political instability, armed conflict and authoritarian regimes especially around protecting freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of association, as well as right to life, dignity, and personal security. With

the ACHPR's independence deteriorating, there is a risk that states may act with impunity and violate human rights without consequence, worsening the continent's human rights situation. In fact, further restrictions of CSO to effective participation at the ACHPR will foster the inability to address corruption and continued lack of accountability undermining gravely the rule of law, including the right to a fair trial, and the right to an effective remedy.

The ACHPR's mandate of protecting and promoting human rights extends to its quasi-judicial arm, which should set precedent to be used at national level in influencing local court decisions in human rights. The widening gap between civil society organisations and the ACHPR has led to a dearth of relevant precedent on prevailing urgent human rights issues.⁴

Worse still, dismissing particular groups contributes to breeding a culture of exclusion in Africa. For example, the AU's position on the rights of sexual and gender minorities prompted the ACHPR and even the NGO forum to remove SOGIE issues from the agenda, making it clear that these groups do not belong in these spaces and that their human rights challenges

⁴ For example, gender-based violence is a serious issue in many parts of the Continent but the ACHPR has only made two decisions clarifying state obligations to prevent, investigate and punish perpetrators of GBV. This does not reflect the magnitude of the problem.

have no place in the ACHPR. In this way, negative political ideologies transcend from national levels to the African Union and into the ACHPR, with no recourse for those experiencing rights violations. This then contributes to the Commission's⁵ delegitimization of its own mandate.

D. THEORY OF CHANGE

ACSE believes that by strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) through education and learning, effectively coordinating their advocacy efforts, and promoting continuous and impactful engagement with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), CSOs will be able to hold the ACHPR and member states accountable. This coordinated effort will lead to a more responsive, accountable, and effective and independent ACHPR that fulfils its mandate to protect and promote human rights in Africa, in collaboration with civil society, member states, and other organs of the African Union.

ACSE's theory of change is based on three main assumptions. Firstly, that CSOs engaging with the ACHPR have a willingness and capacity to recognize the need for

change within the mechanism, secondly, that CSOs are willing and have the capacity to actively engage with the ACHPR to address its inefficiencies and limitations, and finally, that there is an understanding and agreement that advocacy is a process and does not end with ACHPR sessions. Ultimately, ACSE hopes to ensure the efficient utilisation of civil society advocacy space at the ACHPR.

“Objective 1: To strengthen the capacity of CSOs to meaningfully engage with the ACHPR and hold it accountable, thereby enabling the Commission to effectively hold member states accountable for human rights violations.”

Strategy: Learning

ACSE will consistently strengthen the capacity of CSOs on the African human rights system, emphasizing the distinction between its ideal functioning and the current reality. This is to enable CSOs to better appreciate the role of the ACHPR in the broader African human rights system. By equipping CSOs with the necessary knowledge and skills, ACSE aims to build a strong and coordinated CSO presence at the ACHPR. This coordinated presence will have a shared vision for effective advocacy

⁵ Refer to footnote no.2

and will be better prepared to challenge and utilise the ACHPR to advance the human rights agenda.

Objective 1 Outcomes:

- a. Increased awareness and skills among CSOs on engaging in the ACHPR through training, forums, and other ways of creating awareness about the ACHPR.
- a. Shared understanding for advocacy at the ACHPR by CSOs, that will enhance engagement with the ACHPR

This shared understanding acknowledges the existing dysfunction within the ACHPR and equips them to better engage with the ACHPR. CSOs recognize their own role in this inefficiency and ineffectiveness, leading to a commitment to develop coordinated advocacy activities that can advance the human rights agenda.

Outputs

- Developing and disseminating a practical guide for CSO engagement in the ACHPR space.
- Training and workshops on the African Human Rights System.
- Drafting and disseminating publications on strategic and progressive human rights issues for ACHPR stakeholders.
- Establishing and maintaining a repository of relevant information on the ACHPR and on ACSE's advocacy work.

- Shared advocacy approaches/tactics for effective engagement with the ACHPR including drafting resolutions, general comments, and others.

Objective 2: To provide a coordination platform that brings together the activities of CSOs in a way that seeks to improve engagement of CSOs at the ACHPR to influence the ACHPR in realising its mandate.

Strategy: Coordination.

ACSE will establish a structure that is focused on supporting advocacy efforts, bringing together CSOs that may have previously worked in isolation or in silos. By uniting these interest groups under a common goal, ACSE seeks to engage civil society actors in addressing issues that impact their ability to work effectively at the ACHPR. This coordinated effort will contribute to a functional ACHPR that can better hold member states accountable for human rights violations.

Objective 2 Outcomes:

- a. A culture of partnership and collaboration between the ACHPR and CSOs.
- b. Coordinated efforts of CSOs engagement in the ACHPR space.
- c. Increased engagements between CSOs' and the African Commission in between sessions.

- d. Functional periodic communication on ACHPRs CSO activities.
- e. Improved transparency of the ACHPR's work, building trust and accountability.

Outputs

- Established thematic and intersectional working groups to better coordinate the engagement and efforts of CSOs.
- An assessment report of CSO's performance on their engagement with the ACHPR.
- An annual report on the status of ACHPR response to human rights issues brought to the commission by CSOs.
- Ability to build momentum for strategic issues of interest that ACSE is campaigning/advocating for ACHPR's action.

Objective 3: To have a strong African Commission that can deliver on its mandates through active participation of CSOs in key decision-making processes that influences the work of the ACHPR.

Strategy: Advocacy.

ACSE will focus on well-coordinated and documented CSO advocacy to support, amplify, and accelerate efforts at the ACHPR. By working together and presenting a united front on specific advocacy initiatives, CSOs will have a stronger impact on the mechanism. ACSE aims to identify

additional issues that require engagement to enhance the effectiveness of the human rights mechanism, ultimately leading to stronger accountability and protection of human rights.

Objective 3 Outcomes:

- a. To have accessible, effective, and transparent Commissioners and Secretariat.
- b. The ACHPR demonstrates increased effectiveness in fulfilling its mandate to promote and protect human rights in Africa, as a result of strengthened CSO engagement.
- c. The enhanced engagement between African CSOs and the ACHPR leads to strengthened human rights protection and accountability mechanisms across the African continent.
- d. CSO's are actively participating in and influencing the ACHPR processes.

Outputs

- Tracking the processes for the selection and appointment of the Commissioners.
- Awareness campaigns on the processes for the selection and appointment of commissioners.
- Hosting bi-annual meetings with Commissioners.
- Running independence campaigns in keeping with the spirit of an independent Commission.

- Partnering with CSOs with observer status, NHRIs, donors, universities and other stakeholders to seek audience before the ACHPR.
- Creating a space and guidance to civil society to organise themselves based on focus areas to advocate before the ACHPR.
- Joint advocacy initiatives for progressive resolutions, general comments, and rules of procedure among others.

Risks

While pursuing its goals, ACSE recognizes the following risks:

- Limited resources may hinder sustained CSO engagement at the ACHPR. To address this risk, ACSE will focus on resource mobilization and seek to engage with stakeholders who share the vision for a functional ACHPR.
- There may be political opposition and resistance to change from some stakeholders within the ACHPR. ACSE plans to address this risk through strategic engagement, building alliances with those who support the project's vision.
- There may be a perception that ACSE is duplicating NGO Forum due the fact that ACSE's work started off as providing space for events on the margins of the ACHPR, and this might be seen as a duplication of efforts that deters participation.
- ACSE risks not attracting members due

to various reasons external to ACSE, including, organizations may not have the capacity to be ACSE members, and organizations may not want to join ACSE for other internal reasons.

- Through the implementation of these strategies and by addressing potential risks, ACSE aims to create a strong and functional ACHPR with effective CSO participation. This, in turn, will contribute to strengthened advocacy efforts, transparency, and accountability mechanisms, ultimately promoting, and protecting human rights across the African continent.

E. WAYS OF WORKING

Values Clarification

We are a coalition that seeks to work collaboratively among ourselves and with other individuals, groups and organisations. We recognise that coalitions are the future of social justice work and that there is a need to build coalitions that are strong and fit for purpose. Having drawn lessons from the past, we have learnt that our indicators of success cannot only be limited to the achievement of strategic objectives that do not pay attention to the human cost of doing social justice work. In recognition of our collective duty to create an enabling environment to work together, we agree to

bind ourselves to co-creating a space that lives up to the following:

a. Accountability:

We recognise that lack of accountability has enabled the proliferation of seemingly well-intentioned practices that have served to weaken civil society. The lack of organised and accountable civil society structures has enabled individual institutions and small groups to advocate on behalf of civil society broadly without accountability measures in place. We recognise the disempowerment that ensues when publicly available information cannot be accessed or can only be accessed by those who enjoy patronage from institutions. As a group that was born out of frustrations of being disempowered by not having access to information, we aim to be accountable to our members and to provide information on our engagement with various stakeholders and share that which we come across that will advance the objectives of our group. We also aim to hold ourselves and each other accountable to deliver on responsibilities while encouraging a culture of requesting for assistance when the desire to do the work is not met by the ability to perform the task.

b. Inclusion:

We recognise that our organisations are structured differently, and that provides us with different strengths. Many people

who work for national NGOs often have competing demands for their time, or do not have funding for regional work and as such are unable to devote time performing allocated tasks in between the sessions of the ACHPR. This discrepancy has had the adverse impact of making universities, regional and international organisations producers of knowledge. We will pursue inclusive partnerships that seek to eliminate this divide by creating opportunities for all members of the group to participate. The linguistic divide that makes our regional spaces predominantly anglophone is another gap that we seek to close. ACSE will therefore ensure inclusion of all groups and organisations notwithstanding age, colour, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, class religion and all other differences.

c. Ongoing learning:

We bring together people who have diverse skills set and with varying degrees of knowledge about the African human rights system. We want to create a space that facilitates learning and development of our members, a space where people feel empowered to ask questions, share opinions or disagree without fear of being bullied, belittled, or undermined. We want to create and share opportunities for collaboration among our members and to enable the space to be an incubator of ideas.

d. Power:

This space belongs to all members of the group and all contributions of our members are valued. We recognise the power imbalance that arises at the intersection of race, class, gender, and other forms of discrimination that often lead to the marginalisation, invisibility and erasure of others in a group when we seek to work collaboratively. Organising work is often weakened not by the lack of progressive ideas but by the inability to pay attention to how power imbalances shape or determine the contributions that individuals can make. We seek to be mindful of the power that we hold, how we exercise it, and the impact that it has on others. We seek to be alert to the unfair advantages that are brought by unequal distribution of resources in social justice formations and to temper the excesses.

e. Political orientation:

ACSE is a space that is created to facilitate civil society engagement with the ACHPR to ensure that it is able to fulfil its mandate of protecting and promoting human rights in Africa. It stands for empowering civil society, rebalancing power dynamics, promoting pluralism and diversity, enhancing democratic accountability, and

resisting authoritarian tendencies within the African human rights landscape.

f. Effective working methods:

For the effectiveness of the space, and achievement of its objectives, ACSE sees its main role as coordinating a space that creates an enabling environment for civil society to engage in advocacy. ACSE has to create trust between its members by engaging in a robust communication strategy that enables stakeholders to engage throughout the year, not only during the ACHPR sessions, consistent in its programming, delivery of quality information and putting in place administrative and operational systems that are fit for purpose.

Membership

ACSE will be made up of organisations and individuals who are interested in carrying out sustained strategic advocacy at the ACHPR. Members will be able to receive training and crucial information, as well as a space to work in concert with like-minded groups over time beyond, during and after the ACHPR sessions.^{6,7}

⁶ Members should engage with ACHPR continually, however detailed membership guidelines will be developed and provided in a separate document.

⁷ Membership will be reviewed and revised if needed after a two-year implementation period.

Governance and Operational Structure⁸

ACSE proposes to work using the following governance and operational structure:

a. Working Groups

Every member of ACSE will contribute to one of the three ACSE areas of work; coordination, advocacy, and learning. Additionally, ACSE members may join or form a working group based on their interest and or expertise. All working groups shall be formed in alignment with ACSE strategic objectives, and in line with ACSE values. The work is structured in working groups to facilitate collaborations between individuals and groups pursuing engagement with the ACHPR on specific topics.

Working Group members are the technical resource to ACSE. The members of each working group should have expertise and/or resources that will contribute to ACSE achieving its objectives. Such expertise and/or resources could include, but are not limited to, knowledge of human rights systems, public institutions, law, social mobilisation, access to relevant community networks, finance and funding, arts, and information technology.

Working groups may focus on specific themes, sub-regional focus, outputs, or campaign areas, and can be temporary or permanent depending on the issue. This will give member organisations a platform to further their own advocacy objectives alongside those of the working groups. Each working group may appoint a coordinator, who is responsible for convening meetings and any other responsibilities so assigned.

Working groups that have worked in or with ACSE in the past include the Litigants Group, a collective of organisations that litigate at the Commission, and the SOGIESC Working Group which is interested in advancing the rights of sexual and gender minorities at the Commission.

Working groups will engage with different stakeholders such as NHRIs, member States, ACHPR secretariat, ACHPR Commissioners, AU organs, human rights advocates, legal experts and scholars. The engagement of these stakeholders will be defined by each working group.

b. Steering Committee

The Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa (ISLA), the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria, Pan African ILGA, Amnesty International and MOLI

⁸ This proposed governance and operational structure will be reviewed and revised if needed after a two-year implementation period.

currently jointly operate as the steering committee of ACSE.⁹

The steering committee is responsible for developing overall strategy and objectives for ACSE, fundraising, overseeing the secretariat and the activities of the working groups, providing trainings, updating curricula, sharing important resources with the members, and leading ACSE advocacy on human rights cross-cutting issues.

Steering committee members commit to carrying out the stated ACSE responsibilities in the absence of external funding.

c. Secretariat

The secretariat is established and coordinated by the steering committee. One of the organisations from the steering committee will be the administrative host of the secretariat and other steering committee members are responsible for fundraising and act as fiscal hosts as needed. The steering committee will appoint a coordinator, and in absence of a coordinator, the steering committee will share responsibility of the coordination of ACSE's work.

The Secretariat must act transparently and in close collaboration with the Steering Committee.

⁹ Steering committee guidelines will be developed and provided in a separate document.

Table 1.1: Organisational Structure

