**20th OSIEA REGIONAL BOARD MEETING**

**19-20March 2016 (Dar es Salaam, TANZANIA)**

**DIRECTOR’S UPDATE (MBURU GITU, Executive Director)**

1. **UPDATES ON STAFFING**

Jaki Mbogo, the health and rights program manager resigned from her position at the end of January 2016 after five years of service. She initially joined as program officer, crime and violence prevention, before moving to the health and rights program as program manager. Recruitment for this vacant position is ongoing jointly between OSIEA and the Public Health Program (PHP) which funds the position and co-funds the health and rights program, and will be completed in the second quarter of 2016.

1. **LEGAL RESTRUCTURING**

There has been slow progress in the registration of the new off-shore legal entity. One of the questions that has taken some time to resolve is which of the OSF entities, some based in the US and others in Europe, will become the members (shareholders) of the entity. The OSF approach has been that there will be a single member which will be an OSF entity. There may be tax and related considerations to resolve in determining this question. The OSF Legal Counsel’s office says it is doing its best to speed up registration. Board members will be asked to fill in a number of documents to facilitate the registration process and we expect the documents to be available during the March 2016 board meeting.

1. **BOARD CAPACITY BUILDING**

With the expansion of the board’s mandate starting from January 2016 to include among other areas, oversight on financial matters, it may be useful for the board to consider some training to prepare them for the additional roles. Subject to the board’s guidance, it may be possible for some of that training to be provided during the board’s regular meetings, perhaps by adding an extra day or two.

1. **STRATEGY -RELATED UPDATES**
   1. **Uganda**: President Yoweri Museveni, 71 years, was declared the winner of the elections held in February 2016. He has already served for 30 years and now has a new five year term ahead of him. Many, including international observers, have characterized the 2016 elections as a whole as not being free and fair. The Uganda elections may have set a new low benchmark for polluted elections in the region. The levels of harassment and intimidation of the opposition and its candidates has been beyond belief. Deep political divisions that occasionally spill into the streets are expected to continue in the coming months and years as the defiant opposition seeks to erode credibility of President Museveni. An election petition to challenge the results has been filed by the Democratic Alliance candidate and former Prime Minister, Amama Mbabazi, and will be determined in mid-April. All these developments will generate widespread human rights abuses as the government will likely brutally respond to challenges against it; security forces have already demonstrated a strong appetite for violence. Civil society organizations advocating for human rights will come under scrutiny and renewed attacks.
   2. **Burundi:** The country continues its slow slide to possible widespread civil war. While the government has in recent days accepted in principle the idea of a dialogue with those opposed to it, many hurdles remain, and many doubt the government’s genuine commitment. The African Union in February backed down on an earlier proposal to send an enforcement mission to Burundi after the government refused to give its consent. Burundi at the same time continues to accuse its neighbor, Rwanda, of supporting actors that seek to destabilize it. The threat of the Burundi conflict evolving into an ethnic war between the majority Hutus and the minority Tutsis remains. Two OSIEA/Africa Regional Office (AfRO) grantees are documenting the human rights violations in Burundi and at the same time working to protect human rights defenders at risk.
   3. **South Sudan:** Efforts towards implementation of the peace agreement remains slow and each side is suspicious of the other. The expected return to Juba of Riek Machar to take up the position of first Vice President in the government as envisaged in the peace agreement will be an important step. Implementation of the security arrangements in the agreement, including the demilitarization of Juba, remains outstanding. The economy is in a really bad shape, made worse by decline in oil production due to the effects of the war, and also the significant reduction in oil revenues as a result of the drop in prices of oil in the international market. Regional and international actors have to maintain pressure, including the threat of personal sanctions targeted at President Salva Kiir and Rick Machar, if some progress is to be seen in implementation of the peace agreement. A significant recent development is the reported admission of the country to the East African Community (EAC). Some argue that the country had not satisfied the human rights and good governance threshold for joining the EAC.
   4. **Rwanda**: President Paul Kagame will continue as the leader of Rwanda in the coming years following constitutional amendments in 2015 that essentially removed presidential term limits. He has been the de-facto leader since 1994 and president since 2000. At a formal level, these constitutional changes were very popular with the people of Rwanda who overwhelmingly voted in favor. At the same time, Rwanda is a complex society in which deciphering where the citizens really are on a particular issue is not easy because of an over bearing military state that intimidates any perceived dissenting voices. In recent days, Rwanda has withdrawn itself from the African Court on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR) to frustrate an ongoing petition filled at the court by Victoire Ingabire alleging violations of her rights; she is an opposition politician serving a prison term following conviction on charges of ‘genocide denial’ and ‘conspiracy against the country through terrorism and war. This move casts doubts on Rwanda’s overall commitment to human rights.
2. **2017-2020 strategy:**

We continue to make progress in the preparation of the 2017-2020 strategy. A draft of the strategy document will be presented at the March 2016 board meeting. We hope for at least preliminary approval of the draft strategy by the board so that we can move ahead towards its completion. Staff members reviewed this draft at the March 2016 staff meeting.

The draft strategy sets out four strategic goals. The first is promotion, respect, and protection of human rights, the rule of law and equal access to justice. The second is promotion, protection and enjoyment of the rights of the marginalized. The third is accountability, fair distribution, and sustainable use of natural and public resources. The fourth is an efficient, healthy, productive, learning and collaborative institutional culture at OSIEA.

The strategic goals will be pursued through these proposed thematic areas: protection and promotion of human rights; democratic governance; equality and non-discrimination; economic governance; and institutional strengthening. OSIEA’s thematic areas of focus correspond to severalcategories of work, including:

1. **Democratic practice**: civic engagement and inclusive participation in governance; democratic institutions reform and innovation; constitutional reforms; democratic practice under adverse contexts; elections; minority leadership and empowerment; transparency and accountability.
2. **Economic governance and advancement:** anti-corruption; food security; local governance; natural resource and energy governance; economic justice; public budgets; taxation; transparency and accountability (public sector) and shared framework on food security.
3. **Equality and non-discrimination**: access to justice; emerging laws and policy practice; equity and social inclusion; minority leadership and empowerment; and concepts on creating awareness and acceptability of disability rights as part of the curriculum in university law schools and on displaced Batwa rights (in Uganda).
4. **Health rights**: equity and social inclusion; governance of health; government delivery of inclusive services; harm reduction; independent living and community participation; palliative care; sexual and reproductive health rights; concept on maternal mortality; and shared framework on drug policy reform.
5. **Human rights movements and institutions:** freedom of association and assembly; security and rights; and protection of human rights defenders at risk.
6. **Journalism**: investigative journalism.
7. **Justice reform and the rule of law:** access to justice; international justice and grave crimes.
8. **General administration and program administration.**

In preparing this strategy, we have taken the approach of anchoring the strategy at the OSIEA-wide level rather than at country and program levels which has been the case in the past; we are using the term ‘corporate strategy’ to describe this. Viewed in this way, the strategy seeks to move OSIEA away from the current ‘siloed’ country program based programming to regional thematic programming. We think that this will improve the quality and reach of OSIEA’s programming, results assessment, and reporting.

Subject to the board’s approval, we plan to realign current country programs to thematic programs. While the details will be worked out later, the new programs as presently conceived are as follows:

* **Health and rights program** (harm reduction; palliative care; sexual and reproductive health; and maternal mortality)
* **Economic governance [development and rights]** **program** (natural resource governance; anti-corruption; economic justice; macro- economic policies including taxation, trade and investments; and food security)
* **Equality and rule of law program** (LGBTI rights; womens rights; disability rights; grave crimes and international justice; access to justice; right to information/freedom of expression; investigative journalism)
* **Democratic governance [governance and constitutionalism] program** (legal and constitutional reforms; electoral reforms).

There will be fewer program budget holders (four from eight). Each program will have a program manager, 2-3 program officers, and 1-2 program assistants. All current country program staff members as well as the disability rights and food security program staff members will be reassigned to the most appropriate program area without loss of position or benefits. At the same time, each country OSIEA operates in will also have a designated country specialist/coordinator (doubling also as a program officer). To reiterate, there will be no job losses in the implementation of the proposed new program structure. When new positions emerge in the context of the program redesign, they will be filled through an internal process unless there is no suitable internal candidate.

We will work with the OSF human resources office to repurpose some existing positions to accommodate the program redesign. The proposal is to roll out the program redesign from January 2017 but if this timeline proves too tight, a January 2018 start date is also feasible. We expect to present to the board in the June 2016 meeting a fuller picture of the program redesign.

The new strategy is prepared in the context of a flat budget (USD 12.9m a year) and a static headcount (38 staff). We will approach the board for both budget and headcount reviews.

1. **FINANCIAL UPDATES**

Please refer to the Finance Director’s updates.