



3RD WEST AFRICA CIVIL SOCIETY WEEK

Redefining Civil Society And The Future Of Democratic Resilience In West Africa

2025



WACSI
WEST AFRICA CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTE

Civic Space Resource Hub (CSR-HUB)

Ford Foundation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The West Africa Civil Society Week (WACSW) is an annual convening that examines the state of civic space in West Africa and charts practical pathways for greater civil society effectiveness and democratic resilience. Building on the maiden edition (Lagos, 2023) which highlighted the deterioration of civic space, democratic retrogression and set out intervention priorities, and the second edition (Abuja, 2024) which interrogated the double-edged role of technology and the role of civil society in West Africa, the third edition, WACSW (Accra, 2025), returns at a moment of critical regional inflection as the civic space conditions exhibit fragility. The 2025 WACSW held in Accra, Ghana, from 19 -20 November 2025, took place at a moment of profound political, institutional, and civic transition across West Africa.

The region is currently experiencing a convergence of democratic stressors: the resurgence of military rule in the central Sahel, the tightening of legal and regulatory controls in formally democratic states, the expansion of digital surveillance and disinformation, and a shifting global development finance landscape that is increasingly uncertain for civil society actors. Together, these dynamics have reshaped the conditions under which civic action is possible, forcing civil society organisations, social movements, and citizen activists to rethink not only what they do, but how they do it. Thus, the WACSW 2025 was conceived as more than a routine convening. It functioned as a strategic pause; a space for diagnosis, reflection, and recalibration, bringing together a diverse cross-section of actors, including established civil society organisations, youth-led movements, feminist and women-led groups, digital rights advocates, journalists, researchers, ECOWAS, and development partners. Participants came from across linguistic, political, and geographic divides, united by a shared concern: the steady contraction of civic space and the long-term implications this holds for democracy, accountability, and social cohesion in West Africa.

Across plenary sessions, thematic panels, and formal exchanges through questions and answers, participants articulated a clear-eyed assessment of the civic environment. In some countries, repression is overt and coercive, marked by arrests, intimidation, censorship, and the criminalisation of dissent under military or emergency rule. In others, repression is subtler but no less consequential, operating through regulatory compliance regimes, restrictive NGO laws, financial surveillance, and cybercrime legislation that collectively narrow the space for independent civic action. Digital transformation emerged as a defining feature of contemporary civic struggle. While digital platforms continue to enable mobilisation, cross-border solidarity, and narrative amplification, they have also



A cross-section of participants during the opening plenary

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regimes, restrictive NGO laws, financial surveillance, and cybercrime legislation that collectively narrow the space for independent civic action. Digital transformation emerged as a defining feature of contemporary civic struggle. While digital platforms continue to enable mobilisation, cross-border solidarity, and narrative amplification, they have also become sites of intense contestation. Participants shared experiences of internet shutdowns, online harassment, coordinated disinformation campaigns, hacking attempts, and surveillance. The digital space, once widely celebrated as a democratizing force, is now increasingly weaponised by state and non-state actors alike. Civil society actors are often poorly resourced to respond to these threats, creating a dangerous asymmetry between those seeking to control information and those seeking to use it for accountability.

Yet the West Africa civil society week convening in Accra was not characterised by despair. Alongside the diagnosis of repression was a strong undercurrent of resilience, innovation, and determination. Participants highlighted the emergence of new forms of civic agency, particularly among young people, women, and informal movements operating outside traditional organisational structures. Youth-led protests, feminist collectives, community-based initiatives, and decentralised networks continue to challenge authoritarian drift, often at great personal risk. A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the changing nature of civil society itself. Traditional NGOs no longer monopolise civic action. Instead, they coexist sometimes uneasily with fluid movements and informal networks that privilege speed, visibility, and emotional resonance over formal governance structures. This shift raises difficult questions about sustainability, accountability, and legitimacy, but it also reflects a broader transformation in how citizens engage with power. Participants emphasised that the future of civic space in West Africa will depend on whether these different actors can develop relationships of complementarity rather than competition.

For donors and development partners, the regional convening offered sobering but constructive lessons. Participants were candid about the limitations of current funding models, particularly short-term, projectized support that prioritises measurable outputs over long-term resilience. In environments characterised by volatility and repression, rigid log frames and compliance-heavy requirements can inadvertently weaken the very actors they aim to support. There was a strong call for more flexible, trust-based funding; greater investment in digital and organisational security; and a shift from isolated national interventions toward regional approaches that reflect the cross-border nature of contemporary authoritarian practices, security and social challenges.

This report documents and reflects on the key discussions, insights, and strategic implications of the third West Africa Civil Society Week in Accra, Ghana. It is intended to speak to multiple audiences: civil society practitioners seeking to navigate shrinking civic space; donors and policymakers grappling with how best to support democratic resilience; governments and multilateral institutions concerned with stability and inclusion; and scholars interested in the evolving political economy of civic action in West Africa. Above all, it captures a moment of collective reckoning and collective resolve among those committed to keeping civic space alive in an increasingly hostile environment.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

ECOWAS



ECOWAS should modernise its regional governance and civic protection architecture to respond to emerging political, technological, and social realities. Key priorities include revising the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance to incorporate digital rights protections, safeguards against internet shutdowns, and responses to disinformation, alongside clear domestication benchmarks for Member States.



The institution should also strengthen intergenerational civic leadership through a structured fellowship linking established and emerging leaders and promote civil society sustainability through blended finance mechanisms that combine public, private, and philanthropic resources.



To enhance transparency and accountability, ECOWAS should establish a regional beneficial ownership registry and joint anti-corruption investigative mechanisms, while also institutionalising mandatory gender and youth inclusion quotas across governance structures.



Further priorities include the creation of a West African Digital Rights Observatory to address AI governance and digital risks; improved civil society ecosystem mapping and coordination platforms, integration of civic actors into early warning and peacebuilding systems; and an annual civic space resilience monitoring framework.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS



Civil society organisations should strengthen internal resilience and external influence through intergenerational collaboration, diversified domestic funding models, and enhanced digital security and AI literacy. Strengthening anti-corruption advocacy, inclusive leadership pipelines, and peacebuilding engagement will further enhance effectiveness.



CSOs should also deepen research and knowledge production for evidence-based advocacy, facilitate participatory governance processes to renegotiate social contracts, and expand partnerships with private sector actors, philanthropy, and diaspora networks to strengthen sustainability and impact.

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS



Development partners should prioritise flexible, long-term core funding to enhance organisational resilience and sustainability. Investment should focus on inclusive leadership development for women and youth, alongside strengthened digital rights, cybersecurity, and ethical AI governance frameworks.



Partners should also support regional anti-corruption systems, including beneficial ownership registries and cross-border investigative collaboration, while investing in protection mechanisms for journalists, whistleblowers, and civic actors.



Sustained support is also required for research and evidence-based advocacy ecosystems, as well as inclusive processes to revise regional governance protocols to address digital repression, civic exclusion, and democratic backsliding.

WEST AFRICA CITIZENS



Citizens should deepen engagement in governance beyond elections through participation in civic forums, accountability mechanisms, and local decision-making processes. Strengthening demand for equitable service delivery and amplifying marginalised voices are critical to inclusive governance.



Citizens should also play an active role in promoting transparency by monitoring public spending, supporting investigative journalism, and utilising access-to-information tools.



Other priorities include strengthening digital literacy to counter misinformation, fostering intergenerational collaboration, supporting domestic resource mobilisation for civic initiatives, and promoting ethical engagement in digital spaces to protect civic freedoms and democratic discourse.



INTRODUCTION

The 2025 WACSW marked the third iteration of an emerging regional platform dedicated to advancing dialogue on civic space and democratic governance in West Africa. The initiative builds on earlier editions that explored the evolving relationship between civil society, democratic institutions, and technological change. In Accra, the focus shifted toward redefining civil society itself and examining the structural transformations shaping civic engagement across the region. Yet WACSW 2025 was more than a standalone convening. It was situated within a broader architecture of resilience-building led by the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) through the co-managed Civic Space Resource Hub (CSR-Hub), itself anchored in the Ford Foundation's global Weaving Resilience initiative. Launched by Ford Foundation in 2022 as an $80 million effort to strengthen and connect civil society organisations and movements across the Global South, Weaving Resilience was designed to support locally rooted, southern-led resource hubs that can help civic actors respond to growing threats to civic space through institutional resilience, strategic relevance, and holistic well-being. [1]

This wider connection is important for understanding the significance of the 2025 convening. The civic ecosystem in West Africa is undergoing significant evolution. Traditional civil society organisations continue to play critical roles in advocacy, policy engagement, and service delivery. However, they increasingly operate alongside a growing array of actors, including youth movements, digital activists, community networks, and diaspora organisations. These actors are reshaping civic participation and influencing political discourse through innovative forms of mobilisation that challenge conventional organisational models. WACSW therefore serves not only as a regional dialogue platform, but also as a practical expression of the same philosophy underpinning Weaving Resilience: that civil society is strongest when it is interconnected, adaptive, locally grounded, and supported through ecosystems rather than isolated interventions. Ford Foundation's emphasis on resource hubs led from the Global South and built around peer learning, contextual responsiveness, and networked support resonates directly with the design and purpose of the CSR-Hub in West Africa.

At the same time, civic space across West Africa has come under increasing pressure. Several countries have experienced democratic backsliding, military interventions, and tightening restrictions on civil society activities. Legislative frameworks governing non-

[1] Darren Walker (2022). Weaving resilience for a stronger civil society in the Global South, Former President, Ford Foundation, 4 October, Darren Walker (2022). Weaving resilience for a stronger civil society in the Global South, Former President, Ford Foundation, 4 October,

governmental organisations have become more restrictive in some contexts, while digital surveillance, disinformation, and online harassment have emerged as new tools for constraining civic activism. Declining resources for democracy and governance programmes have further strained many organisations operating within already challenging environments. In this evolving context, strengthening civil society's resilience has become an urgent priority. Civil society resilience increasingly depends on the ability of organisations, movements, and networks to weave stronger ecosystems of solidarity and mutual support. Across the region, civic actors operate within tightening regulatory environments, shrinking civic space, and growing political and economic uncertainty. Resilience, therefore, goes beyond the survival of individual organisations; it reflects the collective strength of interconnected civic actors who can share knowledge, coordinate responses, and sustain democratic engagement over time.

It is precisely this idea of "weaving resilience" that gives deeper meaning to the relationship between the CSR-Hub and WACSW. Ford Foundation conceived Weaving Resilience around the need to strengthen civil society in the Global South through interrelated and highly localised hubs that could act as centers of excellence for resilience, offering support for institutional capacity, adaptability, security, and strategic relevance. In West Africa, the Civic Space Resource Hub, co-implemented by WACSI and Spaces for Change, was established in this spirit: as a regional initiative aimed at strengthening the capacity of civil society in Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal to respond to civic space threats, foster learning across borders, and build stronger networks of support among civic actors. The West Africa Civil Society Week is one of the flagship regional convening spaces through which this mission is made visible and practical.

The Accra convening took place against this complex background. Participants widely acknowledged that defending civic space requires both strategic coordination and institutional renewal within the civil society sector itself. Many organisations face declining financial resources, increasing regulatory scrutiny, and rising public skepticism regarding their legitimacy. Addressing these challenges requires rethinking traditional approaches to civic engagement and strengthening connections with the communities that civil society seeks to represent. WACSI and partners designed the programme to facilitate both reflection and practical learning. Through plenary discussions, thematic panels, and interactive workshops, participants examined the intersection of democratic governance, economic development, youth leadership, peacebuilding, and institutional resilience.

A key feature of the convening was its emphasis on intergenerational dialogue. Younger activists and student leaders engaged directly with experienced civil society practitioners and governance experts. This interaction highlighted the importance of knowledge transfer and mentorship in sustaining civic leadership across generations. Another defining characteristic of the meeting was its regional perspective. Participants repeatedly stressed that challenges affecting civic space in West Africa often transcend national borders. Issues such as disinformation, transnational corruption networks, violent extremism, and political repression require coordinated regional responses. Civil society networks, therefore, need to strengthen cross-border collaboration and build alliances capable of addressing these shared challenges. By the conclusion of the meeting, participants had collectively articulated a vision of civil society as a dynamic ecosystem rather than a fixed institutional sector. This ecosystem includes formal organisations,

grassroots movements, community leaders, journalists, researchers, and citizens who share a commitment to democratic accountability and social justice. Strengthening this ecosystem requires sustained investment in institutional capacity, strategic alliances, and innovative approaches to civic participation.

The attendance statistics show that the 2025 WACSW brought together **216 participants** from **19 countries** and **133 organisations**. The largest representation came from Ghana **(116 participants)**, followed by Nigeria **(59)**, Senegal **(9)** and Togo **(8)**, while several other countries, such as Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea (Conakry), Kenya and Uganda, each had one or two participants. The gender distribution comprised **129 male participants (60%) and 87 female participants (40%)**. Participants represented a diverse mix of civil society actors across West Africa and beyond. The sessions focus on redefining civil society and strengthening democratic resilience in West Africa.

Activities include keynote discussions, thematic panels, and interactive dialogues addressing civic space, democratic governance, and the evolving role of civil society organisations. The programme also features opportunities for knowledge exchange, networking, and collaborative reflection among practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. Across the two days, the discussions emphasised strengthening partnerships, sharing regional experiences, and identifying strategies to enhance civic engagement, democratic accountability, and the long-term sustainability of civil society institutions in West Africa. The sections that follow summarise the daily proceedings and explore the major themes that emerged from the discussions. They are divided into daily proceedings, thematic highlights, national spotlights, and strategic implications. They offer a snapshot of the civil society at a moment of profound transformation, and a roadmap for navigating the uncertain terrain ahead.



A cross-section of participants during the opening plenary

OPENING REFLECTIONS

Civic Space, Civil Society, and Democracy Beyond Elections



Dr. Nana Afadzinu
Executive Director, WACSI

The opening ceremony of WACSW set the tone for the discussions that followed, framing the gathering as both a moment of reflection and a call to action for civil society actors across West Africa. In her opening remarks, **Dr. Nana Asantewa Afadzinu**, Executive Director of WACSI, welcomed participants and acknowledged the partners who had contributed to the planning of **WACSW 2025.**[2] She emphasised that the gathering represents a collective effort by diverse actors committed to strengthening democratic governance in the region. **Dr. Afadzinu** presented a candid assessment of the challenges confronting civil society in West Africa. She highlighted the growing pressures resulting from democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, funding constraints, and the securitisation of political discourse. These dynamics, she noted, have created a difficult environment for civic actors seeking to hold governments accountable and promote inclusive governance. Yet, she also emphasised that these challenges have stimulated renewed civic energy across the region. Grassroots movements, youth initiatives, and cultural forms of activism are increasingly shaping political conversations and expanding the boundaries of civic engagement. These developments demonstrate that citizens across West Africa remain deeply committed to democratic ideals despite institutional setbacks.

Dr. Afadzinu stressed that the purpose of the meeting was not merely to repeat familiar diagnoses of civic space challenges. Instead, the gathering sought to encourage honest reflection about the internal weaknesses of the civil society sector and remedial efforts. She identified organisational rivalry, excessive reliance on external funding, and limited accountability to communities as factors that have weakened the sector's legitimacy. Addressing these challenges, she argued, requires a renewed commitment to three strategic priorities. First, civil society initiatives must be firmly grounded in community realities to ensure authenticity and relevance. Second, organisations must develop resilient financing models and partnerships that can sustain their work despite shifting donor landscapes. Third, civil society actors must build stronger coalitions based on shared values and collective goals. Her remarks framed the **WACSW 2025's** discussions as an opportunity to redefine civil society in ways that reflect contemporary political and social realities in West Africa.

[2] These organisations and persons include the following: WADEMOS (West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network), Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), Spaces for Change, Africtivistes, Katutu Civil Rights Centre, Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice, West Africa Democracy Radio, Institute for Security Studies (Dr. Oluwole Ojewale), Hivos-EU SEE, Prof. Charles Ukeje (Obafemi Awolowo University), Mr. Oladayo Olaide, Independent Thought Leader.

Representing Spaces for Change, **Ms. Sola Olutayo**, delivered remarks on behalf of the organisation's leadership. She emphasised that the WACSW initiative was conceived in response to the gradual contraction of civic space across the region. Her intervention highlighted the evolving thematic focus of the platform. The inaugural edition concentrated on the foundational role of civil society in democratic consolidation. The second edition examined the potential of technology to amplify civic engagement. The 2025 WACSW, by contrast, sought to explore how civil society can reinvent itself in response to new governance and security challenges. Sola noted that Africa has increasingly been identified as a global hotspot for terrorism and violent extremism. At the same time, several countries have experienced unconstitutional changes of government and political instability. These trends underline the importance of civil society participation in peacebuilding and governance processes. She emphasised that research conducted by Spaces for Change has demonstrated the critical role that civil society organisations play in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Community-based initiatives, human rights advocacy, and citizen participation are essential components of sustainable peace. Strengthening civil society capacity in these areas, therefore, contributes directly to regional stability.



Ms. Sola Olutayo, delivering opening remarks on behalf of Ms. Victoria Ibezim-Ohaeri, Executive Director, Spaces for Change

The opening ceremony also featured remarks from the Ford Foundation's West Africa regional office. Representing the Foundation's leadership, **Ms. Onyinye Onyemobi**, highlighted the importance of civil society as a cornerstone of democratic resilience. She emphasised that growing inequality across societies poses a major threat to democracy, undermining public trust and reducing citizens' sense of agency. Strong civil society organisations help restore hope by creating channels for citizens to participate in governance and demand accountability. Her remarks invited participants to reflect on several key questions. What forms of solidarity are needed to bridge divides within civil society and amplify marginalised voices? What leadership models are required to guide the sector through a period of transformation? And what institutional architecture can ensure that civil society remains sustainable and effective in the years ahead?

The African Union High Representative on Silencing the Guns, **Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas**, African Union High Representative on Silencing the Guns, offered a broader regional perspective on the role of civil society in democratic governance. He cautioned against reducing democracy to periodic elections while ignoring the deeper social and economic conditions that shape citizens' lives. According to **Dr. Chambas**, a democracy that fails to provide basic services and opportunities will remain fragile regardless of its formal institutions. Citizens expect democratic systems to deliver tangible improvements in areas such as healthcare, education, and social protection. He also warned against the phenomenon of NGOization, in which civil society organisations become detached from the communities they claim to represent. While professionalisation can enhance organisational capacity, it can also create distance between civil society leaders and grassroots constituencies. He noted that the civic ecosystem in Africa is becoming more diverse, with youth movements, digital networks, and community initiatives contributing new forms of activism. Harnessing this diversity requires collaboration protocols that allow different actors to complement one another.



Ms. Onyinye Onyemobi, delivering opening remarks on behalf of
Dr. Catherine Chinedum Aniagolu-Okoye, Executive Director, Ford Foundation West Africa

Special Guest of Honour Address

The Deputy Chief of Staff at the Office of the President of Ghana, **Ms. Nana Oye Bampoe-Addo**, the Special Guest of Honour, delivered a deeply personal and reflective address that drew on her extensive experience across civil society, public service, and government. Speaking from her own journey as a civil society actor, former minister, and now senior government official, she highlighted the important relationship between civic engagement and policymaking and demonstrated how activism and governance can reinforce each other in strengthening democracy. At the heart of her message was a powerful assertion: "Civil society is not a stakeholder of the democratic journey; it is the heartbeat of democracy." This statement positioned civil society not as a peripheral actor, but as the vital force that sustains democratic life by promoting inclusion, accountability, participation, and public scrutiny. **Ms. Bampoe-Addo** urged civil society actors to move beyond entrenched silos and work in greater solidarity, while remaining responsive to the real needs and aspirations of the communities they serve. She underscored the importance of adaptability, collaboration, and ethical leadership in confronting democratic backsliding and strengthening civic resilience across West Africa. She also reaffirmed the commitment of President John Mahama's government to creating an enabling environment for civil society to thrive, and to translating this commitment into practical mechanisms for meaningful collaboration between government and civil society.

Looking ahead, **Ms. Bampoe-Addo** outlined several priorities for a reinvigorated civil society in West Africa. These included strengthening civic technology infrastructure through open data access for real-time election monitoring and human rights documentation; combating disinformation through regional programmes that promote informed digital citizenship; embedding multi-stakeholder advisory mechanisms in legislative processes; mobilising regional solidarity through cross-border election observation and civic action; and leveraging research, community-led peacebuilding, and indigenous knowledge to strengthen democratic practice. She also issued a strong call for ethical grounding, urging African civil society to renew its fidelity to the communities it represents. She concluded by reminding participants that nation-building cannot be left to state institutions alone: "We cannot leave nation-building to state institutions alone. We must be an indispensable partner in shaping democratic practices, safeguarding our freedoms, and upholding accountability that belongs to us all."



Ms. Nana Oye Bampoe-Addo, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the President, Republic of Ghana

Keynote Address

The keynote address delivered by **Ambassador Dr. Abdel-Fatau Musah**, Commissioner, Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), situates the role of civil society within the broader historical evolution of democracy and regional cooperation in West Africa. The address begins by tracing ECOWAS's trajectory from its founding in 1975 to the present day, highlighting how the regional body emerged during the Cold War primarily as an economic integration project rather than a democratic governance institution. Over time, however, the role of citizens and civil society became central to the region's political transformation, particularly during the democratic wave of the 1990s, when citizen movements and national conferences challenged authoritarian rule and promoted multiparty democracy. During this period, elections increasingly replaced military rule as the mechanism for political change, and civil society actors played key roles in advocating for constitutional governance, electoral transparency, and accountability. The speaker notes that the strength and unity of civil society during this era were largely due to the presence of a clear common adversary, namely colonial rule and later authoritarian regimes. This shared struggle helped mobilise broad coalitions of activists, students, labour unions, and civic organisations that were instrumental in advancing democratic reforms across the region.

The address then shifts to a detailed assessment of the contemporary political, socio-economic, and geopolitical challenges confronting West Africa. According to the Ambassador, the current wave of democratic backsliding in the region is driven by a combination of internal governance failures and global geopolitical shifts. Internally, governance deficits such as corruption, economic mismanagement, manipulation of constitutional rules, and the weakening of state institutions have eroded the social contract between governments and citizens. In several countries, elected leaders have



Ambassador Dr. Abdel-Fatau Musah Commissioner, Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), ECOWAS

used judicial processes, security institutions, and constitutional reforms to extend their hold on power while restricting political competition and silencing dissent. These trends have contributed to widespread public frustration, especially among young people who constitute the majority of the region's population and face high levels of unemployment and marginalisation.

Externally, the global environment has become more volatile with the return of great-power competition, the rise of a multipolar international order, and the growing influence of emerging powers in Africa. This geopolitical landscape intersects with regional security threats, including terrorism, organised crime, and climate-induced conflicts, further complicating democratic governance. The withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from ECOWAS and the resurgence of military coups illustrate the depth of the region's political tensions and the fragility of democratic institutions. At the same time, the keynote highlights ECOWAS's achievements over the past five decades, including peacekeeping operations, conflict mediation, electoral support, and economic integration initiatives such as the Common External Tariff and the West African Power Pool. These efforts demonstrate the continued importance of regional cooperation in addressing shared challenges.

In his conclusion, **Ambassador Dr. Abdel-Fatau Musah** emphasises the critical role of civil society in redefining democratic resilience in West Africa. The speaker argues that civil society must evolve from traditional advocacy models toward more proactive and innovative forms of engagement capable of responding to contemporary challenges. This transformation includes leveraging digital technologies to mobilise citizens, counter disinformation, and strengthen transparency in governance processes. Civil society organisations are encouraged to build collaborative ecosystems that connect grassroots communities, youth innovators, policymakers, and regional institutions. Initiatives such as the proposed ECOWAS Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) are envisioned as platforms through which civil society can contribute more directly to policymaking and regional governance. The keynote also highlights successful examples of civil society impact across the region, including election monitoring initiatives in Nigeria, anti-corruption campaigns in Senegal, and peacebuilding efforts led by regional networks. Looking ahead, the address calls for deeper collaboration between ECOWAS and civil society to strengthen democratic institutions, promote inclusive governance, and harness the region's demographic potential, particularly the creativity and energy of its youth population. Ultimately, **Ambassador Dr. Abdel-Fatau** concludes that the future of democratic resilience in West Africa will depend on a renewed partnership among citizens, civil society, and regional institutions to promote accountable governance, social inclusion, and sustainable development.

SESSION 1

Economic Integration, Democratic Governance and Shared Prosperity in West Africa



Chaired by Mr. Oladayo Olaide
Board Chair WACSI Node, Nigeria

West Africa's regional integration agenda is driven by the interconnected goals of economic integration, democratic governance, and shared prosperity across a market of more than ***400 million people***. Regional initiatives such as the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) and the Common External Tariff promote duty-free trade and free movement across borders, while major infrastructure projects, including the $15 billion Lagos-Abidjan Corridor and the West Africa Power Pool, aim to strengthen regional connectivity and energy stability. Efforts toward a single regional currency are also advancing to reduce transaction costs and improve economic stability. Democratic governance remains central to this agenda, with ECOWAS emphasising the enforcement of the rule of law, mandatory compliance with rulings of the ECOWAS Court of Justice, and mechanisms to address military coups and terrorism that threaten regional stability. The broader objective is to ensure shared prosperity through inclusive growth, youth empowerment, digital market expansion, and social accountability initiatives. By 2035, the region aims to increase intra-regional trade by 30% while strengthening resilience to external economic shocks through public-private partnerships. However, these promises and integration experiences remain largely aspirational for many citizens who continue to face deep economic inequalities, unemployment, poverty, weak public services, and persistent democratic deficits across several states in the region.[3]

One of the earliest thematic discussions at ***WACSW 2025*** examined the link between economic governance and democratic accountability. Participants from civil society, development institutions, and public policy circles explored how weak economic governance undermines democratic legitimacy and reinforces persistent inequality across West Africa. The session noted that, although electoral processes have expanded across the region over the past three decades, this progress has not consistently translated into better economic opportunities or stronger social services for citizens. As a result, the gap between formal democratic institutions and people's lived economic realities has become a major source of frustration and political instability. Participants also observed that weak domestic resource mobilisation remains a major barrier to economic transformation in the region. In many West African countries, tax revenue accounts for only a small share of gross domestic product, often between ten and fifteen

[3] Kingsley Ighobor (2025). ECOWAS at 50: Our focus remains peace, security and prosperity, Dr. Omar Alieu Touray, President of the ECOWAS Commission, says the body is stronger now than ever, 28 May 2025 https://africarenewal.un.org/en/magazine/ecowas-50-our-focus-remains-peace-security-and-prosperity

per cent. This limited fiscal capacity restricts governments' ability to invest in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and social protection.

The effects of weak revenue mobilisation are worsened by poor public financial management and widespread corruption. Revenue leakages, procurement irregularities, and opaque budgeting reduce the impact of public spending and weaken citizens' trust in state institutions. In response, participants urged civil society organisations to engage more deeply in economic governance. They stressed that civil society plays a vital role in promoting transparency and accountability in public finance by monitoring budgets, advocating fair and equitable tax reforms, and encouraging citizen participation in fiscal policy debates. The discussion also underscored the importance of regional economic integration as a pathway to sustainable development. Although ECOWAS has established frameworks for trade liberalisation and economic cooperation, implementation remains uneven across member states. Participants noted that governments often fail to honour commitments on trade policy, currency convertibility, and cross-border mobility. Civil society, therefore, plays an important role in holding governments accountable for these regional integration commitments. By advocating transparent economic policies and monitoring regional agreements, civil society organisations can help ensure that integration delivers tangible benefits for ordinary citizens.

Another aspect of the discussion focused on the growing significance of diaspora remittances within West Africa's economy, particularly their expanding role in sustaining livelihoods, supporting household resilience, and complementing national development efforts across the region. These remittances amount to billions of dollars each year and represent a major source of financial inflows to the region. However, much of this money moves through informal channels and remains outside broader development strategies. Participants therefore suggested that governments and civil society organisations should explore innovative ways to channel diaspora contributions into national development. Structured diaspora investment platforms, community development funds, and transparent governance frameworks could help direct remittance flows towards productive sectors of the economy. Speakers also stressed that economic transparency is the foundation of democratic accountability. Without access to fiscal information and meaningful participation in economic decision-making, citizens cannot effectively assess their governments' performance. Civil society organisations therefore have a critical responsibility not only to advocate for transparency and accountability in economic governance, but also to model these principles in their own operations. By upholding high standards of organisational transparency and accountability, civil society can strengthen its credibility as a watchdog of public institutions. Ultimately, participants concluded that strengthening democratic governance in West Africa requires a holistic approach that combines economic reform, institutional accountability, and civic participation. Economic justice and democratic resilience are inseparable, and civil society organisations must play an active role in advancing both.

SESSION 2(A)

NGO-ization and the Question of Civil Society Legitimacy



Chaired by Mr. Ahmed Hamza Tijani
Senior Programme Manager, HiiL

According to the Open Society Foundations, NGOs should not be conflated with civil society. While NGOs can play an important role in reducing transaction costs and facilitating civic engagement, large national and international NGOs may also evolve into bureaucratic institutions driven by agendas that are increasingly detached from the everyday concerns of citizens. From this perspective, voluntary organisations, grassroots movements, and community-led initiatives are often seen as more authentic expressions of civil society than global NGOs advancing narrow or externally driven interests. This line of analysis, therefore, suggests that civil society should be understood primarily in normative rather than purely instrumental terms. Thus, one of the most thought-provoking discussions at the conference focused on what is commonly described as "NGO-isation." The term refers to the professionalisation of civil society organisations in ways that can distance them from grassroots constituencies and community realities. Participants acknowledged that donor funding and professional project management systems have helped many organisations build technical expertise and institutional capacity. However, they also noted that these developments have had unintended consequences for civil society's legitimacy. A recurring concern was the shift from downward accountability to communities towards upward accountability to donors. Many civil society organisations now devote significant energy to meeting reporting requirements and donor expectations, sometimes at the expense of maintaining strong relationships with the communities they serve. This has led some citizens to view civil society organisations as representing external interests rather than local priorities. In some cases, communities feel that their experiences and data are extracted for project proposals without meaningful feedback or tangible benefits.

Speakers argued that restoring civil society's legitimacy requires a deliberate effort to rebuild trust between organisations and their constituencies. This process involves more than rhetorical commitments to community engagement. It requires structural reforms that embed community participation into organisational governance and programme design. Several participants also highlighted the urban concentration of civil society organisations as a factor contributing to disconnection from rural communities. Many organisations operate primarily in capital cities where donor offices and policy institutions are located. This geographic concentration limits their ability to understand and respond to challenges faced by communities in remote areas. Language barriers further exacerbate this problem. Advocacy materials and policy discussions often take place in official languages that may not be widely spoken by rural populations. Effective civic engagement, therefore, requires the use of local languages and culturally relevant communication strategies.

Another part of the discussion focused on the relationship between traditional civil society organisations and emerging actors such as social movements. In recent years, youth-led movements and digital activism have become increasingly influential in shaping political debate across West Africa. Youth protest movements in several countries have shown the ability of grassroots initiatives to mobilise large numbers of citizens around issues such as corruption, economic inequality, police brutality, and governance failure. These movements often operate outside formal organisational structures and rely heavily on social media for mobilisation. While they are a dynamic force for democratic accountability, tensions sometimes arise between them and established civil society organisations. Traditional NGOs may struggle to adapt to the fluid structures and rapid mobilisation strategies of social movements. Participants therefore stressed the need for stronger collaboration between institutionalised organisations and grassroots initiatives. Each brings distinct but complementary strengths: established organisations often offer policy expertise, institutional experience, and access to decision-makers, while grassroots movements contribute energy, authenticity, and close community ties. Partnerships between these actors can strengthen the wider civic ecosystem. Such collaboration requires mutual respect and recognition of different forms of civic leadership. The discussion concluded that civil society in West Africa must move beyond donor-driven models towards more autonomous structures rooted in community priorities. Achieving this will require diversified funding, stronger community engagement, and renewed commitment to civic values.



From left to right: Prof. Charles Ukeje, Ms. Ahoefa Huguette Sossou, Dr. Nana Afadzinu, Dr. Olufunmilayo Akinyele, Mr. Juwon Sanyaolu, Mr. Ahmed Hamza Tijani

SESSION 2(B)

Youth and Leadership: Filling the Gaps and Amplifying Young Voices



Chaired by Mr. Rotimi Olawale
Executive Director, YouthHub Africa, Nigeria

Africa's population is young and growing at twice the pace of other continents. Half the current population of sub-Saharan Africa is under ***25 years of age***, and each year between 2015 and 2035, there will be half a million more 15-year-olds than the year before. West Africa's demographics reflect this continental trend.1 Between 1950 and 2007, the population increased from approximately ***70 to 315 million*** (more than quadrupling), with about one-third aged ***15–24 years*** and ***60 per cent*** of the population under 25 years of age. The youth bulge in West Africa is expected to grow through 2035 and plateau around 2050, by which time West Africa's population will have doubled to about 700 million people.[4] Therefore, West Africa's rapidly growing youth population presents both an opportunity and a governance challenge. A large and increasingly educated young population can drive innovation, entrepreneurship, democratic participation, and regional development if adequately empowered. However, exclusion from leadership, unemployment, and weak political representation risk deepening instability, migration, and social unrest. Youth and leadership are therefore essential for strengthening inclusive governance, harnessing demographic dividends, and ensuring sustainable peace and development across the region.

The third session on Day One focused on youth leadership and the challenges young people face when seeking to participate in governance and civic activism across West Africa. The session brought together student leaders, youth activists, civil society practitioners, and development experts to examine why youth participation in governance remains limited despite the region's overwhelmingly young population. West Africa has one of the youngest populations in the world. In many countries, young people constitute the majority of the population. Yet, this demographic reality is rarely reflected in political leadership structures or decision-making processes. Several structural barriers were identified as factors limiting youth participation. One of the most prominent challenges relates to the weakening of student union movements across the region. Historically, student unions served as training grounds for future political leaders and civic activists. Many influential political figures in West Africa began their public careers through student activism.

In recent decades, however, student unions have faced increasing restrictions from university administrations and government authorities. Suspensions of student unions, administrative interference in elections, and disciplinary actions against outspoken

[4] Francis Fortune, Olawale Ismail, and Monica Stephen (2015). Rethinking Youth, Livelihoods, and Fragility in West Africa: One Size Doesn't Fit All, Fragility, Conflict, and Violence Group, World Bank https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/0c3973ed-008c-51e0-b391-237746701aa6/content

leaders have undermined the continuity of student leadership structures. These disruptions have eroded the institutional memory and ideological training that previously characterised student movements. Without stable organisational platforms, many young activists struggle to develop the skills and networks necessary for sustained civic engagement. Economic constraints also play a significant role in limiting youth participation. High levels of unemployment and economic insecurity force many young people to prioritise immediate survival needs over civic activism. In such circumstances, participation in governance processes can become a luxury rather than a viable career pathway. Gender dynamics further complicate the landscape of youth leadership. Young women who aspire to leadership roles often encounter social expectations and cultural norms that discourage public engagement. The pressures associated with leadership positions, including harassment and public scrutiny, may disproportionately affect women. Participants therefore emphasised the importance of creating supportive environments that enable young women to participate fully in civic life. Measures such as leadership training, mentorship programmes, and reserved leadership positions (such as a quota system for women) in student unions can help address gender disparities.

Another key issue discussed during the session was the absence of effective mentorship systems connecting experienced civic leaders with emerging youth activists. Intergenerational dialogue was widely recognised as essential for transferring knowledge, preserving institutional memory, and sustaining civic movements. Civil society organisations were encouraged to play a proactive role in supporting youth leadership development. This support may include providing political education programmes, negotiation training, and advocacy skills workshops for student leaders and young activists. Participants also emphasised the importance of protecting the rights of student leaders and youth activists. Arrests, intimidation, and academic sanctions against outspoken youth leaders create a climate of fear that discourages civic participation. In a nutshell, the discussion underscored that meaningful youth engagement requires moving beyond symbolic inclusion toward genuine decision-making power. Young people must be recognised not only as beneficiaries of development programmes but as leaders capable of shaping the future of their societies.



From right to left: Mr. Idriss Bilyaminu Ndasadu' Lau, Ms. Grace Mawusi Annor, Mr. Rotimi Olawale

SESSION 3(A)

Resource Capture, Corruption, and Accountability in West Africa



Chaired by Dr. Hussaini Abdu
Country Director, CARE International, Nigeria

Resource capture and corruption in West Africa drain billions from regional economies annually, diverting crucial development funds into the hands of political elites and multinational networks. Weak institutional oversight, opaque contracting, and elite capture of community development funds severely undermine accountability and fuel public distrust across the region.[5] An extant study reveals that Africa is a net creditor to the rest of the world, losing an estimated ***$89 billion*** annually to illicit capital flight and trade misinvoicing. In contrast, the continent receives roughly ***$19 billion to $40 billion*** annually in foreign aid, meaning resource flight siphons out roughly 2 to 4 times the value that enters as aid.[6]

Discussions on the second day of Civil Society Week turned toward governance accountability and the structural problem of resource capture across West Africa. Participants from civil society organisations, governance institutions, and investigative networks examined how corruption and opaque financial systems undermine democratic governance and weaken public trust in institutions. The session began with a diagnosis of the mechanisms through which public resources are captured by powerful political and economic actors. Speakers observed that corruption in the region increasingly involves sophisticated networks linking political elites, private sector actors, and international intermediaries. These networks exploit weaknesses in procurement systems, beneficial ownership disclosure frameworks, and financial oversight institutions. A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the growing complexity of corruption schemes. Traditional forms of petty corruption remain widespread, but large-scale financial crimes increasingly involve cross-border transactions and complex corporate structures designed to conceal the true beneficiaries of public contracts. This reality complicates the work of civil society organisations seeking to monitor public spending and expose corruption.

Opacity in public procurement enables resource capture. Government contracts are frequently awarded to companies whose beneficial owners remain undisclosed. In some cases, companies linked to political elites receive lucrative contracts without transparent

[5] Ojewale, O. (2026). Undermining Peace: Banditry, Gold, and Elite Collusion in Northwest Nigeria. Deviant Behavior, 47(4), 686–705. https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2025.2456074; Kendra Dupuy (2017). Corruption and elite capture of mining community development funds in Ghana and Sierra Leone, https://www.cmi.no/publications/5875-corruption-and-elite-capture-of-mining-community

[6] Debt Justice (2017). Africa subsidises the rest of the world by over $40 billion in one year, according to new research, 24 May 2017, https://debtjustice.org.uk/press-release/africa-subsidises-rest-world-40-billion-one-year-according-new-research

IMPACT OF RESOURCE FLIGHT AND AID



$19 billion - $40 billion annually in foreign aid



Illicit capital flight & trade misinvoicing worth $89 billion



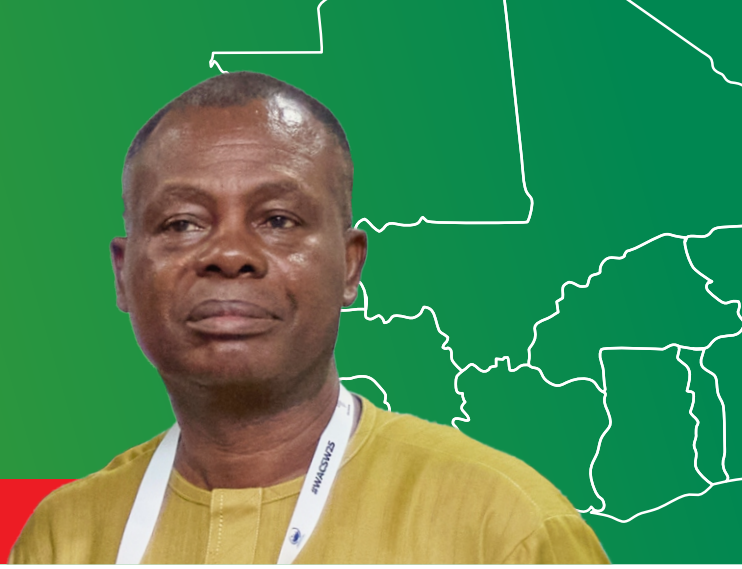
AFRICA IS A NET CREDITOR TO THE REST OF THE WORLD

bidding processes. These practices divert resources away from development priorities and undermine citizens' confidence in public institutions. Therefore, civil society actors emphasised the importance of strengthening transparency on beneficial ownership across the region. Public registries that disclose the individuals who ultimately control companies can help expose hidden networks of influence and prevent politically connected actors from exploiting procurement systems. Another dimension of the discussion concerned the importance of strengthening investigative collaboration across national borders. Because many corruption networks operate transnationally, effective accountability efforts require coordinated responses involving civil society organisations, journalists, and regulatory institutions in multiple countries.

Participants also highlighted the crucial role played by investigative journalism in exposing corruption. Partnerships between journalists and civil society organisations can generate useful evidence that can trigger official investigations and public debate. However, speakers acknowledged that individuals who expose corruption often face significant risks. Investigative journalists and anti-corruption activists may encounter harassment, intimidation, or legal retaliation from powerful actors who benefit from opaque systems. Protecting these actors, therefore, remains a key priority for civil society networks. The discussion concluded with a broader reflection on the relationship between transparency and democratic governance. Participants agreed that without access to reliable information about public finances, citizens cannot effectively hold their governments accountable. Strengthening transparency mechanisms, protecting whistleblowers, and building investigative capacity within civil society are therefore essential components of democratic resilience.

SESSION 3(B)

Peace, Security, and Justice Imperatives



Chaired by Dr. Vincent Azumah
Head, Monitoring and Evaluation, WANEP

This session addressed the intersection between democratic governance and security challenges in the region. West Africa's peace and security landscape is shaped by political upheavals, extremism, and inconstant governance. Since 2021, changes in military power have disrupted constitutional processes, weakened governance structures and strained regional cooperation. Extremism is spreading from the Sahel Zone into coastal states. Disinformation and organised crime are contributing to the destabilisation of the region.[7]

Participants recognised that peace and security cannot be separated from broader governance dynamics. Weak institutions, social exclusion, and economic marginalisation often create conditions that enable violence and instability. Speakers observed that West Africa has experienced a significant escalation in violent extremism in recent years, particularly in the Sahel region. Terrorist groups have expanded their operations across several countries, exploiting fragile state institutions and unresolved grievances among local communities. At the same time, several countries have experienced military coups and political instability, further complicating efforts to address security threats. These developments have raised important questions about the resilience of democratic institutions and the effectiveness of regional security frameworks. Participants emphasised that traditional security responses focused primarily on military operations



Military commanders inspect arms and ammunitions recovered from Boko Haram jihadists in Goniri, Yobe State, in Nigeria's restive northeast. @chathamhouse.org

[7] GIZ (2023). Promoting peace, security and good governance in West Africa, ECOWAS Peace, Security and Governance https://www.giz.de/en/projects/ecowas-peace-security-and-governance

are insufficient to address the root causes of instability. While military action may disrupt armed groups in the short term, sustainable peace requires addressing deeper structural issues such as governance deficits, economic exclusion, and social marginalisation.

Civil society organisations were encouraged to play a more active role in promoting human-centred approaches to security. Such approaches prioritise the protection of communities, respect for human rights, and inclusive dialogue among stakeholders. Community-based peacebuilding initiatives were highlighted as particularly important. Local civil society organisations often possess deep knowledge of community dynamics and can facilitate dialogue between conflicting groups. These organisations can also help build trust between communities and state institutions. Participants also discussed the importance of strengthening early warning systems that enable governments and civil society actors to identify emerging conflicts before they escalate into violence.

The ***Warning and Response Network (WARN)***, spearheaded by the ***West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)***, becomes pivotal. Regional organisations such as ECOWAS have developed mechanisms for monitoring security threats, but these systems can be strengthened through greater collaboration with local civil society networks. Another emerging concern discussed during the session was the role of digital technology in shaping security dynamics. While digital platforms provide opportunities for civic mobilisation and information sharing, they can also be used to spread disinformation, incite violence, or facilitate recruitment by extremist groups. The foregoing analyses suggest that civil society organisations play an important role in promoting digital literacy and countering harmful online narratives. Strengthening digital resilience is increasingly recognised as an essential component of democratic stability. Overall, the discussion underscored that peace, security, and justice are inseparable from democratic governance. Sustainable peace requires inclusive institutions, accountable leadership, and active citizen participation.



From left to right: Mr. El Moctar Cisse, Ms. Joy Animah, Debrah, Mr. Kop'ep K. Dabugat, Dr. Nansata Yakubu, Dr. Vincent Azumah, Joseph Wemakor

SESSION 4 PLENARY

Strengthening Civil Society in a Multipolar and Democracy-Challenged Context



Chaired by Dr. Emmanuel Akweytey
Executive Director, Institute for Democratic Governance, Ghana

Since the adoption of the ***Abuja Declaration of Political Principles in 1991*** and the ***Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2001*** by the Economic Community of West African States, the regional bloc has maintained a formal policy of ***"zero tolerance"*** for unconstitutional changes of government, particularly military coups d'état. Despite these normative commitments, West Africa has continued to experience recurrent coups, with a notable resurgence since 2020. While the regional body has often appeared proactive in responding to these political crises through sanctions, mediation efforts, and diplomatic engagement, its interventions have yielded limited success; a complex combination of domestic governance failures, regional security challenges, socioeconomic grievances, and shifting international geopolitical dynamics continues to undermine political stability across the region.[8]

One of the most strategic discussions during this panel focused on the changing geopolitical environment and its implications for civil society in West Africa. Participants examined how shifting global power dynamics are influencing democratic governance and civic activism in the region. The discussion recognised that the global order is increasingly characterised by multipolar competition among major powers. Countries across Africa are engaging with a wide range of international partners, each promoting different political and economic models. While this evolving landscape presents new opportunities for investment and cooperation, it also creates complex challenges for democratic governance. External actors may pursue geopolitical interests that do not always align with democratic principles or local development priorities. Participants emphasised that civil society organisations must maintain their independence in this context. Aligning too closely with particular geopolitical actors can undermine the credibility and legitimacy of civic organisations.

Another important topic discussed during the session was the concept of decolonising civil society practice. Participants argued that civil society models in Africa have historically been shaped by external funding structures and institutional templates imported from other regions. While these models have contributed to organisational capacity-building, they may not always reflect the realities of local communities. Participants therefore emphasised the importance of developing locally grounded

[8] Onapajo, H., & Babalola, D. (2024). ECOWAS and the challenge of preventing a resurgence of coups d'état in West Africa: An assessment of the 'Zero Tolerance' policy. South African Journal of International Affairs, 31(1), 23–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/-10220461.2024.2353266



From left to right: Dr. Chukwuemeka Eze, Prof. Nana Tanko, Mr. Alioune Tine, Dr. Emmanuel Akweytey

approaches to civic engagement. This process involves redefining priorities based on community needs rather than donor agendas. It also requires strengthening domestic sources of support for civil society activities, including philanthropy, membership contributions, and social enterprises. Participants further highlighted the importance of developing specialised expertise within civil society organisations. Many organisations attempt to address a wide range of issues simultaneously, which can dilute their impact. Building deeper expertise in specific policy areas can enhance the credibility and effectiveness of civil society advocacy. Youth participation also emerged as a central theme in the discussion. Younger generations are increasingly driving civic mobilisation across the region, yet they remain underrepresented in leadership positions within established civil society organisations. Strengthening youth integration within the sector is therefore essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability of civic engagement. Mentorship programmes, leadership training, and inclusive governance structures can help facilitate this transition. Lastly, the session emphasised that civil society must evolve in response to changing political and geopolitical realities. Building strong, independent institutions rooted in community legitimacy will be essential for sustaining democratic resilience in West Africa.

SESSION 5 PLENARY

Weaving Resilience in Defence of Civic Space: Lessons from Civic Space Resource Hub Project



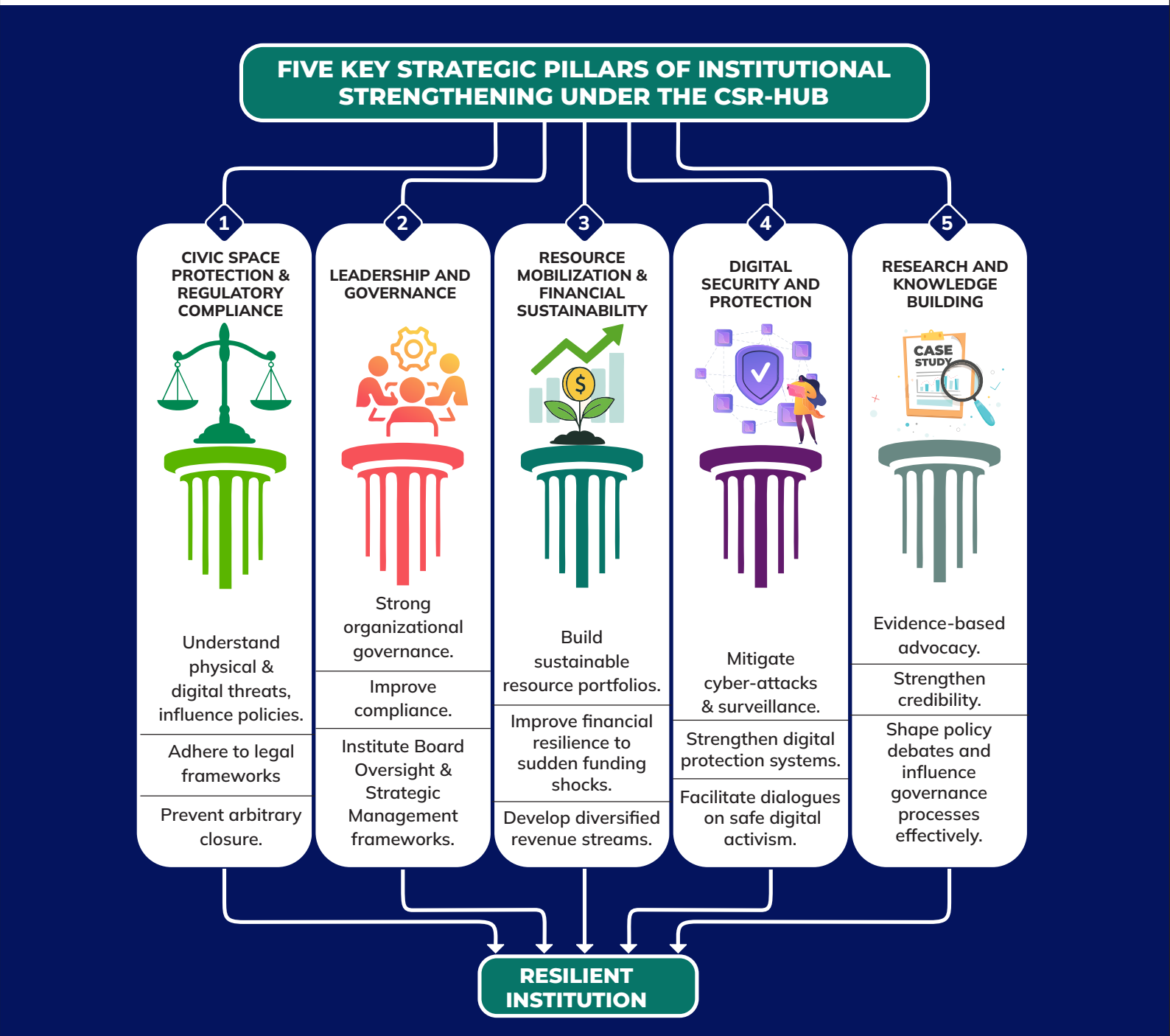
Chaired by Mr. Oyebisi Oluseyi
Executive Director, Nigeria Network of NGOs (NNNGOs)

A central theme of Civil Society Week was the importance of strengthening the institutional capacity of civil society organisations themselves. Participants explored lessons from the Civic Space Resource Hub initiative, which has supported civil society organisations in ***Ghana***, ***Nigeria***, and ***Senegal***. The discussion emphasised that defending civic space requires strong organisations capable of withstanding political pressure, regulatory challenges, and operational disruptions. Civil society organisations cannot effectively defend democratic freedoms if their own institutions are weak or vulnerable. ***Five key strategic pillars*** of institutional strengthening deployed under the CSR-Hub were discussed during the session.

The ***first pillar*** involves Civic Space Protection and Regulatory Compliance. Civil society organisations must build capacity to understand the nature and dimensions of threats to civic space – both physical and digital – and to effectively respond to them and influence government policies and actions critical to the protection of civic space and an enabling environment, while adhering to the legal frameworks governing their operations. Compliance with registration requirements, financial reporting standards, and governance regulations helps protect organisations from arbitrary closure or legal challenges. The ***second pillar*** concerns Leadership and Governance. Strong organisational governance, including knowledge and skills to improve organisational compliance to regulatory bodies, institute board governance and oversight frameworks, institute frameworks for strategic management and sustainability, as well as deploy strategic communications, are crucial for institutional resilience and operational efficiency. The ***third pillar*** relates to Resource Mobilisation and Financial Sustainability. It involves assisting organisations in building a sustainable resource mobilisation portfolio and improving financial resilience to effectively deliver on their mandates. This is particularly crucial at a time when organisations have become increasingly vulnerable to sudden funding shocks. Developing diversified revenue streams can enhance long-term stability. The ***fourth pillar*** focuses on Digital Security and Protection. As civil society organisations increasingly rely on digital platforms for communication and advocacy, they face growing risks of cyber-attacks and surveillance.

Strengthening digital protection systems, alongside facilitating national and regional dialogues on digital security and advocacy for safe digital activism, is therefore essential to enhancing organisational resilience. The ***fifth pillar*** focuses on Research and Knowledge Building. Evidence-based advocacy not only strengthens the credibility of

civil society organisations but also enhances their capacity to shape policy debates and influence governance processes effectively. The Civic Space Resource Hub initiative further illustrates the value of integrated approaches that address these interconnected dimensions simultaneously. Participants noted that organisations investing in comprehensive institutional strengthening—including digital security, knowledge production, organisational sustainability, and collaborative advocacy—are better positioned to withstand external pressures, adapt to evolving civic space challenges, and sustain long-term advocacy efforts.



SESSION 6(A)

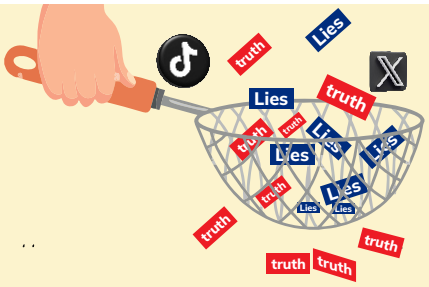
Ecosystem Mapping and Collaboration Protocols among Organised and Organic Institutions



Chaired by Ms. Omolara Balogun
Head, Policy Influencing and Advocacy, WACSI

The final discussions of Civil Society Week focused on the broader ecosystem of civic actors in West Africa. Participants examined the relationships between institutionalised organisations and emerging grassroots movements, exploring strategies for building stronger collaboration across the sector. Speakers observed that the civil society landscape has become increasingly diverse. Alongside traditional NGOs, new forms of civic activism have emerged, including youth movements, digital advocacy networks, and informal community initiatives. While this diversity enriches the civic ecosystem, it also creates coordination challenges. Differences in organisational structures, access to funding, and operational strategies can generate tensions among actors. Participants therefore emphasised the importance of developing collaboration protocols that enable different actors to work together effectively. Building trust between institutionalised organisations and grassroots movements is essential for strengthening collective impact. Legal protection mechanisms for activists, movement leaders, and human rights defenders were also identified as an important area for collaboration. Activists and movement leaders often face legal risks when engaging in protests or advocacy campaigns. Civil society networks can provide legal support and risk-sharing mechanisms to protect these actors.

Resource inequality within the sector represents another challenge. Institutionalised organisations often have greater access to donor funding, while grassroots movements operate with limited financial resources.[9] Developing innovative financing mechanisms that support both types of actors can reduce competition and encourage collaboration. Digital security and misinformation were also discussed as emerging threats to the civic ecosystem. Coordinated disinformation campaigns can undermine public trust in civil society organisations and weaken democratic discourse. Participants therefore emphasised the importance of strengthening collective resilience through information sharing, digital literacy programmes, and coordinated communication strategies.



> *"Digital security and misinformation were also discussed as emerging threats to the civic ecosystem."*



[8] Challenges and Opportunities Facing African NGOs in 2026, https://africanngos.org/2026/02/27/challenges-and-opportunities-facing-african-ngos-in-2026/

SESSION 6(B)

Women's Rights, Gender Equality, and Inclusive Participation



Chaired by Ms. Antoinette Mbrou
Coordinator, Women in Law and Development in Africa, WILDAF

Many African states have incorporated international gender equality commitments into their constitutions and domestic legal frameworks. The African Union's Maputo Protocol, formally known as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, has significantly influenced reforms relating to reproductive rights, inheritance laws, and protections against gender-based violence across the continent. At the regional level, the ECOWAS has played a particularly important role in supporting Member States to develop and implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security. These initiatives have strengthened policy frameworks for women's participation in peacebuilding, governance, and conflict prevention.

Despite these advances, participants noted that significant cultural, economic, and political barriers continue to hinder progress toward gender equality and inclusive participation in West Africa. While women remain the backbone of the region's agricultural sector and informal economies, they continue to experience persistent inequalities in land ownership, political representation, access to resources, and decision-making power. At the same time, feminist movements and women-led advocacy networks across the region continue to push for transformative reforms to advance social justice, democratic inclusion, and gender-responsive governance.[10]

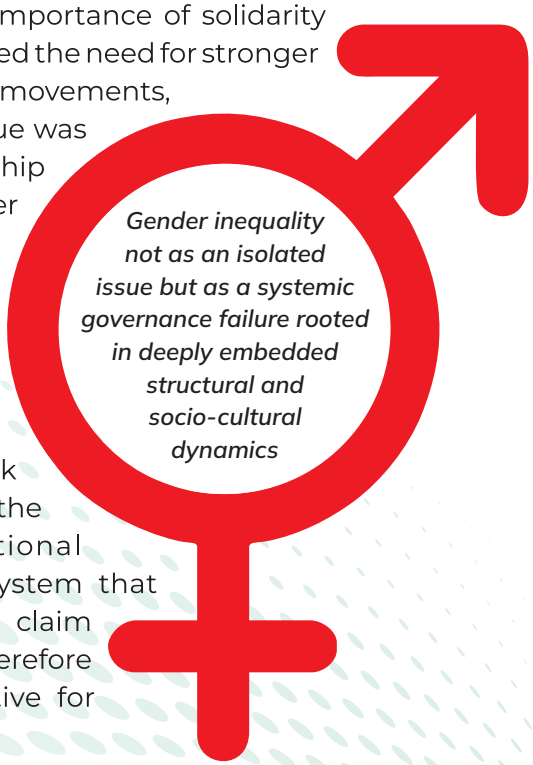
The session on women's rights and inclusive participation brought into sharp focus one of the most persistent structural deficits in West Africa's democratic landscape. Despite decades of advocacy and the existence of legal frameworks promoting gender equality, women remain significantly underrepresented in political leadership and public decision-making. Across the region, women occupy only a small fraction of parliamentary seats and remain marginal in executive and judicial institutions, a reality that undermines both democratic legitimacy and inclusive governance. Participants approached gender inequality not as an isolated issue but as a systemic governance failure rooted in deeply embedded structural and socio-cultural dynamics. Political parties were identified as critical gatekeeping institutions that often reproduce exclusion through formal and informal practices that limit women's access to leadership opportunities. These institutional barriers are compounded by economic constraints, as many women lack the financial resources required to compete in political processes that are increasingly

[10] Mariagoretti Swanta Ankut (n.d). Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Africa: Progress, Challenges, and the Way Forward, https://ihrda.org/en/gender-equality-and-womens-rights-in-africa-progress-challenges-and-the-way-forward/

monetised. The discussion further highlighted the enduring influence of patriarchal norms that shape societal expectations regarding women's roles in public life. Cultural and religious narratives are frequently invoked to justify exclusion, reinforcing a political environment in which women's participation is perceived as secondary or conditional. These norms are not merely social but are embedded within institutional practices, making them difficult to dismantle without deliberate and sustained intervention.

Participants also emphasised that legal frameworks alone are insufficient to guarantee women's participation. While many countries in the region have adopted laws and policies to protect women's rights, enforcement remains weak. Women activists and political actors continue to face intimidation, harassment, and gender-based violence, both offline and in digital spaces. The rise of cyber-harassment and technology-facilitated abuse has introduced new risks that disproportionately affect women in public life. Country experiences illustrated the severity of these challenges. In Niger, extreme disparities in parliamentary representation reflect entrenched exclusion. In Ghana, financial and institutional barriers within political parties limit women's participation. In Mali, insecurity and weak enforcement mechanisms expose women activists to significant risks. Across the region, digital platforms have become new arenas of gender-based violence, further constraining women's engagement. Despite these challenges, the session underscored important pathways for advancing gender equality. Civil society organisations were recognised as critical actors in promoting women's rights through advocacy, community engagement, and accountability mechanisms. Their role extends beyond complementing government efforts to include acting as intermediaries between women's constituencies and public institutions, as well as watchdogs that expose violations and demand reform.

A key insight emerging from the discussion was the importance of solidarity within the women's rights ecosystem. Participants stressed the need for stronger collaboration between formal organisations, grassroots movements, and community-based actors. Intergenerational dialogue was identified as particularly important for sustaining leadership and preserving institutional memory within the gender equality movement. The session also highlighted the need to move beyond symbolic commitments toward substantive participation. Women's inclusion in governance must translate into meaningful influence over decision-making processes and tangible improvements in the lives of women and communities. Without such transformation, democratic systems risk remaining exclusionary and incomplete. Ultimately, the discussion framed gender equality as a foundational requirement for democratic resilience. A political system that systematically excludes half of its population cannot claim legitimacy. Strengthening women's participation is therefore not only a matter of rights but a strategic imperative for sustainable democratic governance in West Africa.





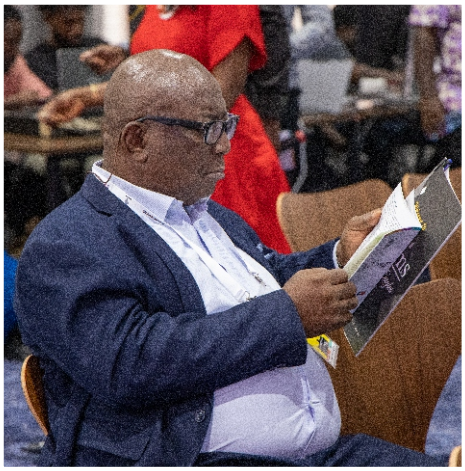

DELEGATE






REDÉFINIR LA SOCIÉTÉ CIVILE ET L'AVENIR DE LA RÉSILIENCE DÉMOCR
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ABIBIGROMMA
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA


CIVIL SOCIETY WEEK 25
DEFINING CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN WEST AFRICA
DE L'OUEST






RE-DEFINING CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN WEST AFRICA
REDÉFINIR LA SOCIÉTÉ CIVILE ET L'AVENIR DE LA RÉSILIENCE DÉMOCRATIQUE EN AFRIQUE


DIGITAL SECURITY
CLINIC








REDEFINING CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN WEST AFRICA






WACSI



WACSW 2025 Technical Partners (From left to right): Dr. Oluwole Ojewale, Institute of Security Studies, Mr. Madi Jobarteh, Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice, Ms. Omolara Balogun, WACSI, Ms. Agnes Thomasi, West Africa Democracy Radio, Prof. Charles Ukeje, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ms. Antoinette Mbrou, WILDAF West Africa, Ms. Aisha Daboe, Africtivistes, Ms. Sola Olutayo, Spaces for Change, Mr. Dayo Olaide, Ms. Marie-Josiane Ngah, WADEMOS

SESSION 7(A)

Material Conditions and Renegotiating the Social Contract



Chaired by Ms. Joy Lawal
Strategic Project Lead, American Business Council, Nigeria

The session on material conditions and the social contract shifted attention to the economic foundations of democratic legitimacy. Participants examined how poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality shape citizens' perceptions of governance and influence their willingness to engage in democratic processes. The discussion began with a stark assessment of material realities across West Africa. A significant proportion of the population lives below the poverty line, while unemployment remains high, particularly among young people. These conditions create an environment in which democratic participation is often disconnected from citizens' everyday experiences. Participants argued that democracy cannot be sustained solely through electoral processes if it fails to deliver tangible economic benefits. For many citizens, the legitimacy of democratic institutions is closely tied to their ability to provide opportunities, services, and improved living conditions.

When these expectations are not met, public trust in governance declines, and citizens may withdraw from political participation. One of the central challenges identified during the session relates to the structure of state revenue systems. Many governments in the region rely heavily on extractive industries and rent-seeking practices rather than developing robust taxation systems. This model weakens the relationship between citizens and the state, as governments become less dependent on citizens for revenue and therefore less accountable to them.

Weak parliamentary oversight further exacerbates this problem. In many contexts, legislative institutions lack the capacity and resources to effectively scrutinise government spending and hold the executive accountable. As a result, citizens have limited avenues to influence economic policy or demand accountability for resource management. The discussion also highlighted the limitations of current civil society financing models. Dependence on external funding constrains organisations' ability to advocate for structural economic reforms and support locally grounded development initiatives. This challenge underscores the need for more sustainable and contextually relevant financing approaches. Participants emphasised

> This process requires governments to prioritise economic policies that deliver tangible benefits while strengthening accountability mechanisms that enable citizens to influence decision-making.

the potential of cooperative and community-based economic models as alternatives to dominant development paradigms. These models promote resource pooling, shared ownership, and local accountability, offering pathways for inclusive economic growth that align with democratic principles.

A recurring theme throughout the session was the need to renegotiate the social contract between citizens and the state. This process requires governments to prioritise economic policies that deliver tangible benefits while strengthening accountability mechanisms that enable citizens to influence decision-making. Civil society organisations were identified as key actors in this process. Their role includes advocating for progressive taxation, promoting economic justice, and facilitating dialogue between citizens and policymakers. By strengthening their engagement in economic governance, civil society can help bridge the gap between democratic processes and material outcomes. The session concluded with a clear message that democracy without development yields limited dividends. For democratic systems to remain legitimate and sustainable, they must deliver meaningful improvements in citizens' lives.



From left to right: Dr. Akin Iwilade, Mrs. Ebun Akin-Falaiye, Mr. Sammy Obeng, Ms. Joy Lawal, Mr. Souleymane Ouedraogo, Ms. Naomi Ayot Oyaro

SESSION 7(B)

Media, Information Integrity, Technology, and Artificial Intelligence



Chaired by Ms. Felicia Anthonio
#KeepItOn Global Campaign Manager, Access Now

The session on media and information integrity addressed the rapidly evolving digital landscape and its implications for democratic governance in West Africa. Participants examined how misinformation, disinformation, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence are reshaping public discourse and influencing political processes. The discussion highlighted the scale and complexity of misinformation challenges in the region. False and misleading information spreads rapidly through digital platforms, undermining public trust in media institutions and complicating citizens' ability to make informed decisions. During elections, coordinated misinformation campaigns can distort public perceptions and weaken electoral integrity.

In public health contexts, misinformation can hinder effective responses and endanger lives. The emergence of deepfakes and synthetic media represents a new frontier in information manipulation. Advances in artificial intelligence enable the creation of highly convincing false audio and video content, which can be used to discredit individuals, manipulate public opinion, and erode trust in institutions. Participants also emphasised the role of limited media literacy in exacerbating these challenges. Many citizens and journalists lack the skills required to critically evaluate digital information, making them more vulnerable to manipulation. Strengthening media literacy was therefore identified as a critical priority for enhancing democratic resilience.

The discussion further highlighted the risks faced by journalists and media organisations. Cyber-attacks, surveillance, and harassment constrain journalists' ability to conduct investigative reporting and hold power to account. Protecting journalists and strengthening digital security were identified as essential components of media integrity. Participants stressed the need for collaborative approaches involving civil society, media organisations, technology companies, and governments. Addressing misinformation requires coordinated efforts to promote factchecking, strengthen ethical journalism standards, and develop regulatory frameworks that protect digital rights while enabling innovation. A key insight from the session was that media literacy functions as a form of societal resilience. Empowering citizens to critically engage with information can reduce the impact of misinformation and strengthen democratic participation. The session concluded by emphasising that reliable information is fundamental to democracy. Without access to accurate and trustworthy information, citizens cannot effectively engage in governance or hold institutions accountable.

> *"Cyber-attacks, surveillance, and harassment constrain journalists' ability to conduct investigative reporting and hold power to account"*

SESSION 8(A)

Enabling Environment for Domestic Resource Mobilisation and African Philanthropy



Chaired by Mr. Charles Kojo VanDyck
Head, Capacity Development, WACSI

The final thematic session of WACS Week focused on one of the most critical structural challenges facing civil society in West Africa: financing sustainability. Building an enabling environment for Domestic Resource Mobilisation (DRM) and African philanthropy involves reforming tax policies, easing cross-border giving regulations, and strengthening civic space. By reducing dependence on foreign aid, these frameworks empower community foundations to independently finance sustainable development and locally driven programs.[11] In the face of the dwindling aid basket, experts argue that Africa must look within to improve resource allocation and promote social impact investments that go beyond just boosting profits.[12]

Participants examined the implications of declining external funding, the limitations of current donor-dependent models, and the urgent need to develop domestic resource mobilisation strategies that strengthen civil society independence and long-term viability. The discussion began with a clear recognition that the financing landscape for civil society is undergoing a significant shift. International funding for governance and democracy programmes is declining, while domestic financing mechanisms remain underdeveloped and largely informal. This dual challenge has created a fragile environment in which many civil society organisations struggle to sustain their operations and maintain strategic autonomy. Participants emphasised that the current funding model has contributed to a dependency syndrome within parts of the civil society sector. Many organisations continue to design programmes based on donor priorities rather than community needs, thereby weakening their legitimacy and disconnecting them from grassroots constituencies. This dynamic also constrains innovation, as organisations often align with funding requirements rather than pursuing contextually relevant solutions. A critical insight emerging from the session was the need for a mindset shift within civil society. Participants argued that domestic resource mobilisation should not be viewed as a substitute for donor funding but as a strategic pathway toward sustainability and independence. Communities across West Africa possess significant, though often untapped, capacity to support civic initiatives when appropriate structures and trust mechanisms are in place.

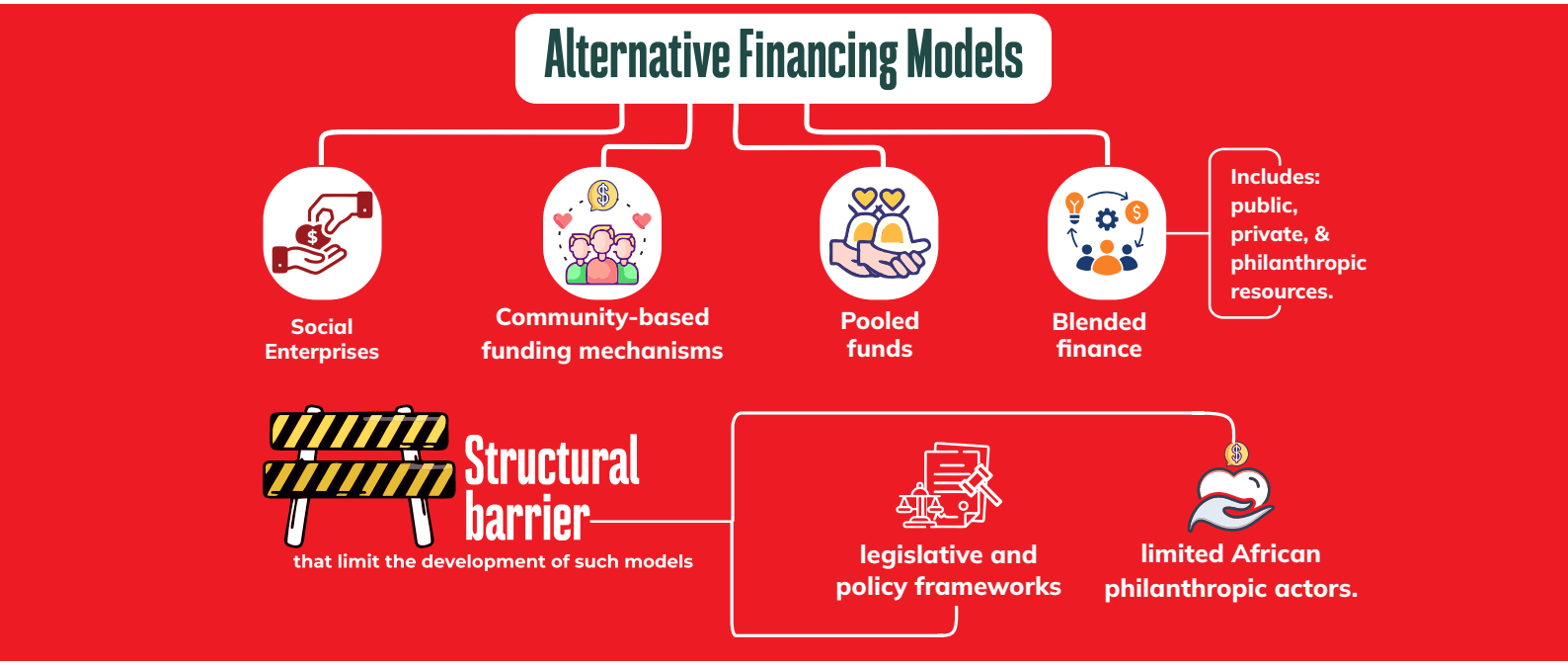
The discussion explored a range of alternative financing models, including social enterprises, community-based funding mechanisms, pooled funds, and blended finance approaches that combine public, private, and philanthropic resources. These models offer

[11] Noblesefa (2025). Promoting domestic resource mobilization for social development: Reflections on our experiences and lessons on what works, Published on October 30, 2025, https://star-ghana.org/promoting-domestic-resource-mobilization-for-social-development-reflections-on-our-experiences-and-lessons-on-what-works/

[12] Oluwole Ojewale and Nengak Daniel Gondyi (2025). Can African philanthropy fill in for American aid cuts? Published on 11 March 2025 in ISS Today https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-african-philanthropy-fill-in-for-american-aid-cuts

opportunities to diversify revenue streams and reduce vulnerability to external funding shocks. However, participants also identified structural barriers that limit the development of such models. In many countries, legislative and policy frameworks do not adequately support alternative financing mechanisms. Regulatory requirements related to financial compliance, anti-money laundering, and counter-terrorism financing can create obstacles for civil society organisations seeking to access or manage diverse funding sources. Another major challenge concerns the limited engagement of African philanthropic actors. Despite the presence of high-net-worth individuals and emerging philanthropic institutions across the continent, their contribution to civil society financing remains relatively low. Participants stressed the need to cultivate a culture of local philanthropy that supports civic initiatives and aligns with community priorities. The discussion also addressed the tension between donor accountability requirements and the realities of grassroots movements. Standardised funding models often fail to accommodate the flexible and informal structures through which many movements operate. As a result, grassroots actors may be excluded from funding opportunities despite their critical role in civic engagement.

Civil society organisations were therefore encouraged to adopt more flexible and inclusive financing approaches that recognise the diversity of actors within the civic ecosystem. Building trust-based funding relationships and supporting organisational development beyond project-specific funding were identified as key priorities. Participants further emphasised that civil society must lead by example in promoting transparency and accountability in financing practices. Demonstrating responsible resource management strengthens credibility and enhances the sector's ability to advocate for reforms in public financial governance. Ultimately, the session underscored that sustainable financing is central to civil society resilience. Without financial independence and stability, organisations cannot effectively fulfil their roles in promoting accountability, defending civic space, and advancing democratic governance.



SESSION 8(B)

Intergenerational Bridge-building of Civil Society Leadership in West Africa



Chaired by Mr. Joachim Onwe
Communications Officer, Spaces for Change

A defining thread running through the WACSW discussions in Accra was the urgent need to strengthen intergenerational linkages within the civic ecosystem. Across multiple sessions, participants returned to a common concern: while youth-led movements are increasingly shaping public discourse and civic mobilisation in West Africa, the relationship between emerging leaders and established civil society actors remains fragile and often fragmented. Bridging this divide is essential not only for leadership continuity but also for sustaining democratic resilience in a rapidly changing political and social environment. Participants observed that the civic landscape in West Africa is undergoing a generational shift. Younger actors, including student leaders, digital activists, and grassroots organisers, are redefining the modalities of civic engagement. They are more agile, less hierarchical, and often operate outside formal organisational structures. Their ability to mobilise quickly, leverage digital tools, and connect with wider audiences has expanded the reach of civic action. However, this dynamism is frequently disconnected from the institutional memory, strategic depth, and policy access that more established organisations possess.

This gap was most evident in discussions on youth leadership and student movements, where participants noted the weakening of traditional platforms, such as student unions, that had historically served as training grounds for civic and political leadership. The erosion of these structures has disrupted the pipeline through which young activists develop leadership skills, ideological grounding, and networks. As a result, many young civic actors operate without sustained mentorship or institutional support, limiting their capacity to transition into long-term leadership roles. At the same time, established civil society organisations face their own challenges in engaging younger generations. Institutional cultures that are rigid, hierarchical, or overly donor-driven can alienate young activists who prioritise flexibility, authenticity, and grassroots legitimacy. This disconnects risks creating parallel civic spheres that operate independently rather than collaboratively, weakening the overall effectiveness of civil society. Against this backdrop, participants emphasised the importance of deliberate intergenerational bridge-building as a strategic priority for the sector. Intergenerational dialogue was identified as a critical mechanism for transferring knowledge, preserving institutional memory, and fostering mutual learning. Experienced practitioners bring insights from decades of advocacy, policy engagement, and organisational development, while younger actors contribute fresh perspectives, innovative approaches, and deeper connections with emerging forms of civic participation.

Several sessions highlighted practical pathways for strengthening these connections. Mentorship programmes were identified as essential tools for supporting young leaders and facilitating their integration into broader civic networks. Structured opportunities for dialogue between generations, such as joint trainings, collaborative projects, and leadership fellowships, can help build trust and create shared understanding across different cohorts of actors. The discussions also underscored the importance of cross-pollination between formal organisations and informal movements. Rather than attempting to absorb or institutionalise youth-led initiatives, established civil society actors were encouraged to engage with them as equal partners within a broader ecosystem. This approach allows each group to retain its strengths while benefiting from collaboration.

Gender dimensions of intergenerational leadership were also highlighted, particularly in the context of women's rights movements. Participants noted the importance of ensuring that young women activists have access to mentorship and leadership opportunities, especially given the additional barriers they face in political and civic spaces. Intergenerational collaboration within women's movements was seen as critical for sustaining progress on gender equality and ensuring continuity in advocacy efforts. A recurring insight across the discussions was that intergenerational bridge-building is not a spontaneous process but requires intentional design and sustained investment. Civil society organisations must create inclusive governance structures that allow younger actors to participate meaningfully in decision-making. This includes rethinking leadership models to accommodate diverse voices and perspectives. Ultimately, the conversations in Accra framed intergenerational bridge-building as central to the future of civil society in West Africa. A resilient civic ecosystem depends on its ability to integrate experience with innovation, continuity with change, and institutional strength with grassroots energy. By fostering stronger connections across generations, civil society can enhance its capacity to respond to emerging challenges, sustain democratic engagement, and build a more inclusive and adaptive leadership pipeline for the region.



From left to right: Mr. Rafiu Lawal, Hon. Abdul Oroh, Hon Joe Ghartey, Dr Fatima Diallo, Hon. Justice Nkemdilim Izuako, Mr. Joachim Onwe

CONCLUSION

The 2025 WACSW in Accra provided an important platform for reflecting on the evolving role of civil society in West Africa. Over two days of intensive discussions, participants examined the structural challenges to democratic governance and explored strategies to strengthen civic engagement across the region. A central conclusion emerging from the proceedings is that civil society in West Africa is undergoing a period of transformation. New actors, new technologies, and new political realities are reshaping how citizens organise, mobilise, and advocate for change. Despite these changes, the fundamental mission of civil society remains constant. Civic organisations serve as bridges between citizens and institutions, amplifying community voices, promoting accountability, and defending democratic freedoms.

Strengthening this role requires continuous adaptation. Civil society organisations must invest in institutional resilience, deepen community engagement, and build strategic alliances capable of addressing complex regional challenges. At the same time, governments and regional institutions must recognise the indispensable contribution of civil society to democratic governance. Inclusive governance systems that embrace citizen participation are more likely to yield stable, legitimate outcomes. The discussions in Accra, therefore, reaffirmed a powerful message. Democratic resilience in West Africa will not emerge solely from formal political institutions. It will also depend on the vitality of civic actors who continue to defend freedoms, challenge injustice, and imagine more inclusive futures for their societies.



A group picture with a cross section of participants

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

ECOWAS

1. **Revise and Strengthen Regional Protocols on Civic Freedoms**
   ECOWAS should undertake a comprehensive revision of the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance to reflect contemporary realities of civic engagement, particularly in the digital age. This revision should explicitly incorporate provisions on digital rights, protection against internet shutdowns, and safeguards against state and non-state disinformation campaigns. Member states should be required to domesticate these provisions through aligned national legislation, with clear benchmarks for compliance and enforcement. Such reforms would modernise the regional governance architecture and provide stronger protections for civic actors operating in increasingly constrained environments.

2. **Facilitate Intergenerational Leadership Exchanges**
   ECOWAS should institutionalise an Intergenerational Civic Leadership Fellowship that connects veteran civil society leaders with emerging youth activists across the region. This initiative should include structured mentorship, leadership training, and joint policy engagement platforms that enable knowledge transfer, skills development, and collaborative action. By bridging generational divides, ECOWAS can help ensure continuity of civic leadership, preserve institutional memory, and foster innovative approaches to democratic engagement.

3. **Promote Blended Finance and Philanthropic Pathways**
   ECOWAS should establish a regional financing mechanism that supports domestic resource mobilisation for civil society through blended finance models. This fund should integrate public resources, private sector contributions, and philanthropic capital to provide flexible, long-term support for civil society organisations and movements. By reducing dependence on external funding, this approach would strengthen organisational sustainability, enhance strategic autonomy, and enable civil society actors to align more closely with community priorities.

4. **Enhance Cross-Border Anti-Corruption Mechanisms**
   ECOWAS should strengthen regional anti-corruption frameworks by establishing a sub-regional beneficial ownership registry and a joint investigative mechanism to address cross-border illicit financial flows. These mechanisms should be designed to facilitate collaboration between national anti-corruption agencies,

civil society organisations, and investigative journalists. By improving transparency and enabling coordinated action, ECOWAS can play a central role in combating resource capture and reclaiming assets for public benefit.

5. **Integrate Gender and Youth Quotas in Regional Governance**
ECOWAS should adopt and enforce mandatory quotas for women and youth representation across its institutions and governance processes. These quotas should be complemented by targeted capacity-building programmes that equip women and young leaders with the skills and resources necessary to participate effectively in decision-making. Such measures would address longstanding underrepresentation and ensure that regional governance structures reflect West Africa's demographic realities.

6. **Support Digital Security and AI Governance Frameworks**
ECOWAS should establish a West African Digital Rights Observatory to monitor digital rights violations, assess the ethical use of artificial intelligence, and support member states in developing regulatory frameworks. This body should also provide technical assistance, legal support, and capacity-building programmes for civil society and media actors. Strengthening digital governance in this way would help safeguard civic engagement in an increasingly technology-driven environment.

7. **Foster Ecosystem Mapping and Collaboration Protocols**
ECOWAS should establish a regional platform to map civil society actors, including formal organisations, grassroots movements, diaspora networks, and private-sector partners. This platform should facilitate information sharing, risk coordination, and joint agenda-setting, thereby strengthening collaboration across the civic ecosystem. By promoting structured engagement, ECOWAS can help reduce fragmentation and enhance the collective impact of civil society.

8. **Advance Peace and Security Reforms with Civic Input**
ECOWAS should reform its Early Warning and Response Network to incorporate structured participation from civil society actors, particularly those engaged in community-level peacebuilding. This approach should prioritise human-centred security strategies that address root causes of conflict, including governance deficits and social exclusion. Integrating civic input into regional security frameworks would enhance legitimacy and effectiveness in responding to emerging threats.

9. **Monitor and Report on Civic Space Resilience**
ECOWAS should institutionalise an annual civic space assessment mechanism that tracks trends in freedoms of association, expression, and assembly across member states. This process should involve civil society organisations in data collection and analysis, ensuring that assessments reflect lived realities. Regular reporting would enhance accountability, inform policy responses, and support evidence-based advocacy for the protection of civic space.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

1. **Cultivate Intergenerational and Ecosystem Solidarities**
   Civil society organisations should intentionally build bridges between established leaders, youth movements, and grassroots actors through structured mentorship, joint programming, and shared advocacy platforms. These efforts should include risk-sharing mechanisms that protect vulnerable actors and strengthen collective resilience. By fostering intergenerational solidarity, civil society can ensure leadership continuity and enhance its capacity to respond to emerging challenges.

2. **Diversify Domestic Funding Pathways**
   CSOs should invest in developing sustainable financing models that combine social enterprises, community-based funding, and pooled resources. These approaches should be complemented by advocacy for public funding mechanisms that support civic engagement. Diversifying funding sources would reduce dependence on external donors and enable organisations to pursue long-term, locally grounded strategies.

3. **Strengthen Digital Rights and AI Literacy Capacities**
   Civil society organisations should prioritise capacity-building in digital security, ethical AI use, and misinformation response. This includes training staff and partners, developing internal protocols, and collaborating with regional networks to establish shared standards. Strengthening digital competencies will enable civil society to operate effectively in increasingly contested information environments.

4. **Advocate for Anti-Corruption and Transparency Reforms**
   CSOs should lead coordinated advocacy efforts to promote transparency in public procurement, beneficial ownership disclosure, and fiscal governance. By partnering with investigative journalists and local watchdog groups, civil society can generate evidence that informs policy reforms and strengthens accountability.

5. **Promote Gender and Youth Inclusive Leadership Pipelines**
   Civil society organisations should institutionalise inclusive leadership practices by adopting internal quotas, mentorship programmes, and leadership development initiatives for women and youth. These efforts should address structural barriers and create pathways for meaningful participation in decision-making.

6. **Enhance Peacebuilding and Security Sector Engagement**
   CSOs should expand their peacebuilding roles by developing community-based mediation frameworks, early warning systems, and human rights monitoring

mechanisms. Collaboration with state institutions should be grounded in principles of accountability and inclusivity.

7. **Conduct Research and Knowledge-Building Initiatives**
Civil society should strengthen its role in knowledge production by documenting civic space trends, governance challenges, and innovative practices. Sharing this knowledge through regional platforms will support evidence-based advocacy and policy influence.

8. **Renegotiate Social Contracts Through Inclusive Advocacy**
CSOs should facilitate participatory platforms that enable citizens to engage in governance processes and advocate for economic reforms. This includes promoting cooperative models and inclusive decision-making mechanisms that strengthen citizen-state relations.

9. **Foster Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships**
Civil society organisations should actively engage with private sector actors, philanthropic institutions, and diaspora networks to build collaborative partnerships. These partnerships can support resource mobilisation, policy influence, and ecosystem strengthening.



From left to right: Dr. Chukwuemeka Eze, Dr. Nana Afadzinu, Ms. Mercy Catherine Adjabeng, Dr. Angela Dwamena-Aboagye, Dr. Emmanuel Akwetey

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

1. **Shift to Flexible, Core Funding Models**
   Development partners should prioritise long-term, flexible funding that supports organisational resilience rather than short-term project outputs. This approach would enable civil society to adapt to changing contexts and maintain strategic independence.

2. **Support Intergenerational and Gender-Focused Capacity Building**
   Donors should invest in programme that strengthen leadership pipelines for youth and women, including mentorship initiatives and leadership fellowships. These programmes should prioritise locally driven approaches and digital competencies.

3. **Facilitate Anti-Corruption and Transparency Initiatives**
   Development partners should expand their support for anti-corruption and transparency initiatives beyond conventional governance programming by investing in long-term institutional reforms and cross-border accountability mechanisms that address the increasingly transnational nature of corruption in West Africa. This support should include technical assistance for the establishment and operationalisation of regional beneficial ownership registries, procurement transparency systems, and interoperable public financial management databases that allow citizens, journalists, and civil society organisations to track the flow of public resources more effectively. Development partners should also strengthen investigative collaborations involving anti-corruption agencies, civil society organisations, media practitioners, and regional institutions to facilitate evidence-sharing and coordinated responses to illicit financial flows, state capture, and procurement fraud.

   Equally important is the need to invest in the protection and capacity-building of investigative journalists, whistleblowers, and civic watchdogs who frequently operate under conditions of intimidation and political pressure. Support should therefore include legal aid, digital security infrastructure, forensic auditing training, and grants for investigative reporting and public interest litigation. By strengthening transparency ecosystems and enhancing regional cooperation, development partners can help restore public trust in institutions, improve democratic accountability, and ensure that public resources are directed toward inclusive development priorities rather than captured by political and economic elites.

4. **Invest in Digital Rights and AI Ecosystems**
   Development partners should significantly increase investments in digital rights, ethical governance of artificial intelligence, and cyber-resilience initiatives as part



of broader efforts to strengthen democratic governance and civic participation in West Africa. The rapid expansion of digital technologies and artificial intelligence across the region has created new opportunities for civic engagement, information dissemination, and citizen mobilisation. However, it has also introduced new risks, including misinformation, algorithmic bias, digital surveillance, cyber-harassment, and the manipulation of public discourse through deepfakes and synthetic media. Donors should therefore support initiatives that enhance digital literacy among citizens, journalists, and civil society organisations, enabling them to critically engage with digital information and identify harmful content.

Investments should also support the development of regional frameworks and policy guidelines on ethical AI governance, data protection, and digital rights safeguards, ensuring that technological innovation remains aligned with democratic principles and human rights standards. In addition, development partners should provide financial and technical support for cybersecurity training, secure communications infrastructure, and emergency digital protection mechanisms for journalists, activists, and civic organisations vulnerable to cyber-attacks and online repression. Supporting collaborative platforms that bring together technology experts, civil society, governments, and media actors would further strengthen regional capacity to respond collectively to emerging digital governance challenges.

5. Invest in Research and Evidence-Based Advocacy

Development partners should prioritise sustained investment in research, policy analysis, and evidence-based advocacy initiatives that strengthen civic engagement and democratic governance across West Africa. Such support should

move beyond short-term, fragmented studies toward long-term partnerships with universities, think tanks, civil society organisations, and grassroots networks capable of generating context-sensitive, policy-relevant knowledge. Attention should be paid to research examining the drivers of shrinking civic space, democratic backsliding, youth exclusion, gender inequality, misinformation, and the renegotiation of social contracts between citizens and the state.

Development partners should also support participatory research methodologies that centre local voices and lived experiences rather than relying solely on externally driven analytical frameworks. To maximise impact, research outputs should be translated into accessible formats, including policy briefs, civic education materials, media content, and advocacy toolkits that civil society actors can utilise effectively in their engagement with policymakers and communities. Equally important is strengthening local research infrastructure and knowledge-production ecosystems so that West African institutions and civic actors become primary producers of evidence, shaping governance debates in the region. By investing in evidence-based advocacy, development partners can help ensure that democratic reforms and civic interventions are informed by credible data, grounded analysis, and community realities.

6. Advocate for Regional Protocol Revisions

Development partners should work closely with the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, national governments, and civil society actors to support the revision and strengthening of regional democratic governance protocols to enable them to respond more effectively to contemporary political and technological realities. Existing regional instruments, such as the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), have played important roles in promoting constitutional order, democratic governance, and electoral integrity across West Africa. However, provisions in these frameworks no longer sufficiently address emerging challenges, including digital repression, misinformation and disinformation, cyber-surveillance, gender exclusion, shrinking civic space, and the political marginalisation of young people.

Therefore, development partners should support inclusive consultations involving governments, civil society, women's rights groups, youth movements, media, and technology experts to ensure revised protocols reflect diverse perspectives and current governance realities. Support should also include technical assistance, policy analysis, and assistance with domestication into national legal frameworks. Key priorities should include strengthening digital rights protections, advancing gender and youth inclusion, fostering civic participation, and advancing progressive economic governance to build more resilient democratic institutions and inclusive civic spaces across West Africa.

WEST AFRICAN CITIZENS

1. **Engage Actively in Civic Processes**
   Citizens should take a more active and sustained role in democratic governance processes beyond periodic electoral participation, consistently engaging in consultations, public forums, community assemblies, participatory budgeting initiatives, and local accountability mechanisms. Democratic governance becomes more legitimate and responsive when citizens are directly involved in shaping public decisions and in monitoring the implementation of policies that affect their communities.

2. **Advocate for Equitable Access to Service Delivery**
   Citizens should utilise available civic spaces to demand equitable access to service delivery and inclusive governance from public institutions. Community participation in local governance structures, school boards, municipal and constituency planning meetings, and oversight committees can strengthen accountability and ensure that governance processes reflect public priorities rather than elite interests. Increased citizen engagement and demand remain essential for rebuilding trust between the state and society, particularly in contexts where poverty, exclusion, and governance failures have weakened confidence in democratic institutions. By actively participating in governance processes, citizens help strengthen democratic culture and ensure that public institutions remain responsive to collective needs and aspirations.

3. **Amplify Marginalised Voices**
   Communities and citizens should actively support the participation and leadership of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and grassroots actors within civic and political spaces to strengthen inclusive democratic governance. As noted by participants across plenaries, marginalised groups often face structural barriers, including economic exclusion, discriminatory social norms, and limited access to decision-making platforms that prevent them from participating meaningfully in public life.

   Citizens, therefore, have a responsibility to challenge exclusionary attitudes and practices within their communities and to create supportive environments that encourage broader participation. This support can take the form of community advocacy, digital amplification of grassroots voices, solidarity campaigns against harassment and discrimination, and the creation of inclusive local forums where diverse groups can contribute to decision-making processes. Strengthening the visibility and participation of historically excluded groups not only enhances social justice but also broadens the diversity of ideas and perspectives informing governance and development processes. Inclusive civic engagement is essential for building democratic systems that genuinely reflect the realities and aspirations of all citizens.

4. **Demand Transparency and Accountability**

Citizens should play a more proactive role in demanding transparency and accountability from public institutions by monitoring government spending, procurement processes, and public service delivery within their communities. Citizens can contribute to anti-corruption efforts by reporting irregularities, participating in social accountability initiatives, supporting investigative journalism, and collaborating with civil society watchdog organisations. Community-level monitoring of infrastructure projects, local budgets, and constituency development funds can help reduce opportunities for corruption and ensure that public resources are utilised effectively for development purposes. Citizens should also make greater use of freedom of information laws and public hearings to demand access to information regarding government decisions and expenditures. Building a culture of accountability requires citizens to move beyond passive observation and become active participants in governance oversight. Through collective vigilance and civic engagement, communities can help strengthen public trust, discourage misuse of public resources, and reinforce democratic legitimacy.

5. **Cultivate Digital Literacy**

Citizens should strengthen their digital literacy skills to navigate increasingly complex information environments characterised by misinformation, disinformation, and manipulated digital content. In the digital age, democratic participation depends heavily on citizens' ability to access, verify, and critically evaluate information circulating through social media platforms, messaging applications, and online news outlets. Individuals should therefore develop the capacity to identify misleading narratives, verify sources before sharing information, and recognise harmful content such as deepfakes and digitally manipulated materials. Community-based digital literacy initiatives, civic education programmes, and peer-learning platforms can play important roles in building these competencies across diverse populations. Strengthening digital literacy is particularly important during elections, public health emergencies, and periods of political tension when misinformation campaigns can undermine public trust and destabilise democratic processes. An informed and digitally literate citizenry constitutes one of the strongest safeguards against manipulation and democratic erosion.

6. **Build Intergenerational Bridges**

Citizens should actively promote intergenerational dialogue and collaboration across communities, civic organisations, and local governance structures to strengthen leadership continuity and social resilience. Older generations possess valuable institutional memory, historical perspectives, and lived experiences that can guide younger civic actors navigating contemporary challenges, while younger generations contribute innovation, digital fluency, and new approaches to mobilisation and advocacy through digital renaissance and social movements.

Bridging these generational divides requires deliberate efforts to create spaces where knowledge, skills, and experiences can be exchanged constructively. As participants suggested, universities and trade unions should be reimagined as arenas for this idea to fester. Community mentorship initiatives, intergenerational civic forums, storytelling platforms, and collaborative advocacy campaigns can help foster mutual learning and solidarity across generations. Strengthening intergenerational connections is particularly important in contexts where traditional civic leadership structures have weakened and where younger activists often operate without sustained institutional support. Building these bridges can help preserve democratic values, sustain civic engagement, and create more adaptive and resilient communities.

7. **Support Domestic Resource Mobilisation**

Citizens and communities should actively contribute to local resource mobilisation efforts that strengthen civil society's sustainability and reduce excessive dependence on external donor funding. Community-based philanthropy, cooperative savings schemes, crowdfunding initiatives, and local solidarity funds can provide important financial support for civic initiatives, grassroots advocacy, and social development programmes. Supporting domestic financing mechanisms also enhances community ownership of civic processes and strengthens accountability between civil society organisations and the populations they serve. Citizens should recognise that sustainable democratic engagement requires collective investment in institutions and initiatives that promote social justice, accountability, and inclusive development. Encouraging a culture of local giving and community resource-sharing can help build more resilient and independent civic ecosystems capable of responding effectively to local challenges and priorities.

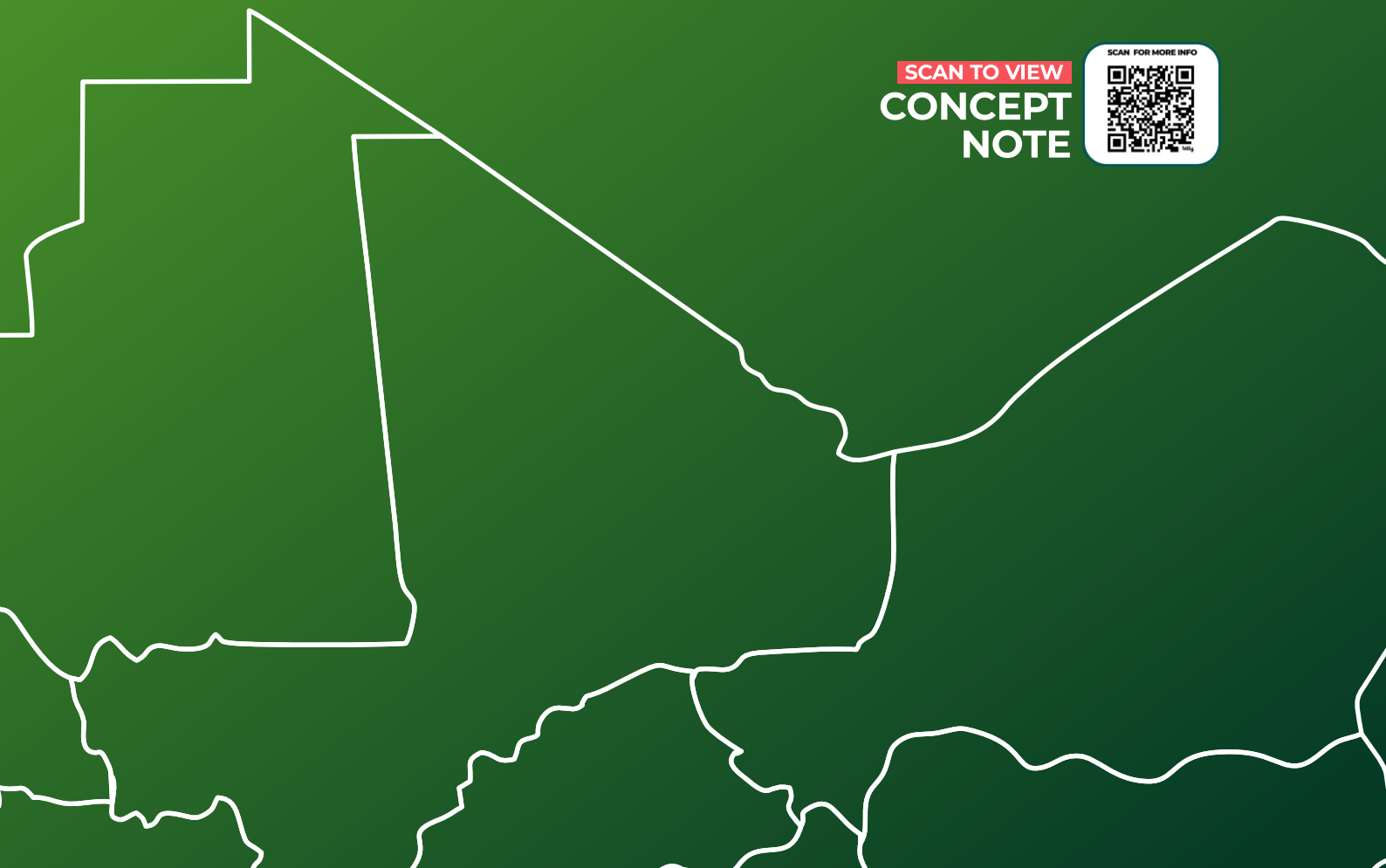
8. **Promote Ethical Digital Engagement**

Citizens should use digital platforms responsibly and ethically by promoting respectful online engagement, reporting harmful content and abuses, and supporting initiatives that protect digital rights and civic freedoms. The expansion of digital communication has increased opportunities for civic participation and public dialogue, but it has also contributed to online harassment, hate speech, misinformation, and the spread of harmful narratives. Citizens, therefore, have a responsibility to contribute positively to digital spaces by engaging constructively, respecting diverse viewpoints, and resisting the amplification of false or harmful information. Individuals should also support efforts to protect journalists, activists, and vulnerable groups who are often targeted by online harassment and coordinated disinformation campaigns. Ethical digital engagement strengthens democratic discourse, promotes healthier information ecosystems, and contributes to the protection of digital civic space across the region.

ANNEX

AGENDA

SCAN TO VIEW
CONCEPT
NOTE



DAY 1 Wednesday 19 November 2025

Facilitator: Mr. Jimm Chick Fomunjong, Head, Knowledge Management, WACSI

0830 - 0900 **Arrival and Registration of Participants**

Welcome performance
Abibigroma Culture Troupe, University of Ghana, Legon

0900 - 1000 **Welcome Ceremony**

Welcome Remarks (5mins each)

- **Dr. Nana Afadzinu,** Executive Director, West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI)
- **Ms. Victoria Ibezim-Ohaeri,** Executive Director, Spaces for Change (S4C)
- **Dr. Catherine Chinedum Aniagolu-Okoye,** Executive Director, Ford Foundation, West Africa Office

Opening Remarks (5mins each)

- **H.E. Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas,** African Union High Representative for Silencing the Guns, African Union
- **H.E. Zia Choudhury,** the United Nations Resident Coordinator, Ghana

Main performance, Abibigroma Culture Troupe, University of Ghana, Legon (5mins)

Official Opening by the Special Guest of Honour
Ms. Nana Oye Bampoe Addo
Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the President, Ghana

1000-1030 **GROUP PHOTO | COFFEE BREAK | NETWORKING & MEDIA INTERVIEWS**

1030-1100 **Keynote address**
H.E. Ambassador Abdel-Fatau Musah (PhD)
Commissioner, Political Affairs, Peace, and Security (PAPS), ECOWAS Commission

1100-1230 **Session 1 (PLENARY) – Maya Banquet Hall**

Theme: Economic Integration, Democratic Governance, Shared Prosperity, and Sustainable Development in West Africa

How rule-of-law, transparency, and accountable institutions contribute to regional trade and investment gains, how African philanthropy and regional financial institutions can finance civic infrastructure, and crowd-in private capital – driving inclusive growth, sustainable development, and

democratic resilience. Reconciling universal, local, and contested narratives on democracy; shifting architecture, domestic resource mobilisation, diversified philanthropy, and implications for regional civil society ecosystem resilience.

Speakers

- **Dr. Yao Graham,** Executive Director, Third World Network
- **Dr. Sonny Onyegbula,** Team Leader for Human Rights Division, UN Mission in South Sudan/Member, Global Board of Spaces for Change
- **Ms. Zéneb Touré,** Manager, Civil Society and Community Engagement Division, AfDB
- **Dr. Edward Ampratwum,** Head, Governance and Inclusive Growth, UNDP
- **Ms. Maame Awinador-Kanyirige,** Senior Manager, Inclusive Finance, Genesis Analytics.

Q & A, Comments, and Discussion in plenary
Chair – **Mr. Dayo Olaide,** Co-Founder, IdeaPlus

1230-1330 LUNCH BREAK

1330-1445 **Session 2 (a) –** Maya Banquet Hall

Host: WACSI

Theme: NGO-isation and Civil Society Legitimacy

Diagnosing professionalisation; upward-accountability traps; re-anchoring in constituencies while retaining policy influence.

Speakers

- **Prof. Charles Ukeje,** Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria
- **Ms. Ahoefa Huguette Sossou,** Programme Manager, CDFH, Togo
- **Dr. Nana Afadzinu,** Executive Director, WACSI
- **Mr. Juwon Sanyaolu,** National Coordinator, #TakeItBack Movement, Nigeria
- **Dr. Olufunmilayo Akinyele,** CSO Accountability and Transparency Initiative (CATI), Nigeria

Q & A, Comments, and Discussion in plenary
Chair: **Mr. Ahmed Hamza Tijani,** Senior Programme Manager, HiiL

Session 2 (b) – Naa Adjeley Hall

Host: YouthHub Africa

Theme: Youth and Leadership: Filling the Gaps and Amplifying Young Voices

Re-interrogating the leadership question: youth and women leadership, youth-led CSOs, student unionism, and young leaders across social strata; empowering youth constituents for political leadership.

Speakers

- **Mr. Prince Stephen Bentil,** SRC President, UPSA, Ghana
- **Ms. Grace Mawusi Annor,** Bilingual Project Assistant, WADEMOS
- **Mr. Idriss Bilyaminu Ndasadu' Lau,** Founder of YAPD4Africa, Nigeria
- **Mr. Adelani David Oluwatodimu,** President, Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Students Union, Nigeria
- **Mr. Emile Kouakou Bela,** Programme Manager, AfDB

Q & A, Comments, and Discussion in plenary
Chair – **Mr. Rotimi Olawale,** Executive Director, YouthHub Africa

1445-1600 **Session 3 (a) –** Maya Banquet Hall

Host: CDD West Africa

Theme: Resource Capture, Corruption, and Accountability

Collusive networks, opaque financing, cross-border investigations; beneficial ownership and procurement transparency; subnational oversight.

Speakers

- **Ms. Marcella Samba Sesay,** CGG, Sierra Leone
- **Mr. Madi Jobarteh,** Executive Director, Centre for Rights and Justice, The Gambia
- **Prof. Omar Ndongo,** Cheikh Anta Diop University, Senegal
- **Mr. Eddie Jarwolo,** Executive, NAYMOTE, Liberia
- **Ms. Beauty Emefa Narteh**, Executive Director, GACC, Ghana

Q & A, Comments, and Discussion in plenary
Chair – **Dr. Hussaini Abdu,** Country Director, CARE International, Nigeria

1445-1600 **Session 3 (b) –** Maya Banquet Hall

Host: WANEP

Theme: Peace, Security, and Justice Imperatives

Reassessing the security-democracy nexus, transnational threats and opportunities for renewed security sector reforms for sustainable peace in West Africa.

Speakers

- **Dr. Nansata Yakubu,** Director, West Africa Programme, Conciliation Resources
- **Mr. Kop'ep K. Dabugat,** Governance, Peace, and Security Expert, Nigeria
- **Ms. Theodora Anti,** Executive Director, FOSDA, Ghana
- **Mr. El Moctar Cisse,** President, Collectif Cri du Cœur (CCC, Mali)
- **Ms. Mercy Larbi,** CHRAJ - Ghana

Q & A, Comments, and Discussion in plenary
Chair – **Dr. Vincent Azumah,** Head, Monitoring and Evaluation, WANEP

1600 - 1615 **TEA / HEALTH BREAK (15-mins)**

1615 – 1700 Day One - Closing Plenary

Dialogue Commitments and Way Forward

DAY 2 Thursday 20 November 2025

Facilitator: Mr. Jimm Chick Fomunjong

0830 - 0900 Arrival and Registration of Participants

0900 - 1045 **Session 4 (PLENARY) –** Maya Banquet Hall

Theme: Strengthening Civil Society in a Multi-polar, Decolonized, and Democracy-Challenged Context
Lecture, by Professor Adebayo Olukoshi, *University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa*

Discussants

- **Dr. Chukwuemeka Eze,** Open Society Foundation (OSF) Africa
- **Prof. Nana Tanko,** Executive Director, Victim Support Fund, Nigeria
- **Mr. Alioune Tine,** Executive Directive Director, Afrikajom Center, Senegal

Q & A, Comments, and Discussion in plenary
Chair: **Dr. Emmanuel Akweytey,** Executive Director, Institute for Democratic Governance, Ghana

1045 – 1100 **TEA / HEALTH BREAK (15-mins)**

1100 – 1215 **Session 5 (PLENARY):** Maya Banquet Hall

Weaving Resilience in Defence of Civic Space: Lessons from Civic Space Resource Hub Project

Speakers

- **Mr. John Frinjuah,** Programme Officer, Policy Influencing and Advocacy, WACSI
- **Mr. Patrick Allam,** Legal Officer, S4C, West Africa
- **Prof. Olubunmi Ashimolowo,** Executive Director, Gender and Development Initiative, Nigeria
- **Ms. Anthoniette Arhin,** Executive Director, Healthy People Foundation, Ghana
- **Mr. Mamadou Mignane Diouf,** Executive Director, ONG PAEDD/CI-SACS, Senegal
- **Ms. Ijeoma Joy Oguadimma,** Executive Director, WEPBI, Nigeria

Chair: **Mr. Oyebisi Oluseyi,** Executive Director, Nigeria Network of NGOs (NNNGOs)

1215-1230 **SECURITY REPORT LAUNCH – SPACES FOR CHANGE**

1230-1245 **Ms. Loveth Liberty – Poet**
Title: Somewhere In The World

1245-1300 ***Recognising Victims of Injustices and Brutalities in West Africa: a decade***

1300 - 1400 **LUNCH BREAK**

1400-1500 **Session 6 (a) –** Maya Banquet Hall

Host: KATUTU Center & WADEMOS

Theme: Ecosystem Mapping and Collaboration Protocols among Organised and Organic Institutions

Roles and incentives across institutional CSOs, movements, rights defenders, informal networks, diaspora, media, private sector, and

philanthropy; workable protocols for joint agenda-setting, risk-sharing, delivery, and access to legal support for ecosystem strengthening.

Speakers

- **Mr. Oliver Baker-Vormawor,** Coordinator, #FixTheCountry, Ghana
- **Ms. Zainab Onuh-Yahaya,** Africa Programme Coordinator, PILnet
- **Mr. Harry Udoh,** Ethic and Good Leadership Awareness Initiative (EGLAI), Nigeria
- **Ms. Aisha Dabo,** Programme Coordinator, AfrictiVistes, Senegal
- **Mr. Prince Akpah,** Head, Movement Resiliency, Katutu Center, Ghana

Q & A, Comments, and Discussion in plenary
Chair – **Ms. Omolara Balogun,** Head, Policy Influencing and Advocacy, WACSI

1400-1500 **Session 6 (b) –** Naa Adjeley Hall

Host: WILDAF

Theme: Women's Rights, Gender Equality, and Inclusive Participation

Assessing and addressing gender equality issues as essential to democratic renewal and institutional effectiveness, particularly around on WHRD protection, unemployment, jobs, exclusion, governance et gender-responsive institutions and elections, financing for feminist movements, and gendered digital-safety concerns.

Speakers

- **Ms. Esther Tawiah,** Executive Director, GENCED, Ghana
- **Mr. Mamane Kaka Touda,** Alternatives Espace Citoyen, Niger
- **Ms. Koniba Samaké,** President, TRIJEUD (Mali)
- **Mr. John Gbenagnon,** Senior Officer, Partnership, Resource Mobilization Office - Sub-Saharan Africa, RFLD, Ghana
- **Ms. Bunmi Dipo-Salami,** Executive Director, BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights, Nigeria

Q & A, Comments, and Discussion in plenary
Chair: **Ms. Antoinette Mbrou,** Coordinator, Women in Law and Development in Africa, WILDAF

1500-1600 **Session 7 (a) –** Maya Banquet Hall

Theme: Material Conditions and Renegotiating the Social Contract

Interrogating diminishing opportunities, weaponised poverty, and how increased vulnerabilities compromise democratic processes, and why good economic reforms aid healthy democracies. Country Spotlights (short): Illustrative cases (e.g., Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sahel/AES) that showcase threats, innovations, and collaboration models with region-wide

Speaker

- **Dr. Akin Iwilade,** University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom
- **Mrs. Ebun Akin-Falaiye,** Executive Secretary, Cooperative Federation of Nigeria
- **Mr. Souleymane Ouedraogo,** Balai Citoyen, Burkina Faso
- **Ms. Naomi Ayot Oyaro,** Executive Director, CAPAIDS Uganda
- **Mr. Sammy Obeng,** Executive Director, Parliamentary Network Africa

Q & A, Comments, and Discussion in plenary
Chair - **Ms. Joy Lawal,** Strategic Project Lead, American Business Council, Nigeria

1500-1600 **Session 7 (b) –** Naa Adjeley Hall

Host: : Media Foundation for West Africa/Pensplusbyte

Theme: Media, Information Integrity, Technology, and Artificial Intelligence

Counter-disinformation playbooks; platform governance; digital rights; responsible AI for CSOs in low-resource contexts.

Speakers

- **Mr. Franck Sombo,** Head, M&E - Tech, West Africa Civil Society Institute
- **Ms. Precious Ankomah,** Programme Manager, Penplusbytes, Ghana
- **Mr. Mohamed B. Fadiga,** RECIT (Benin/Senegal)
- **Ms. Vivian Affoah,** Programme Manager, MFWA
- **Ms. Agnes Thomasi,** Station Manager, West Africa Democracy Radio

Q & A, Comments, and Discussion in plenary
Chair: **Ms. Felicia Anthonio**, #KeepItOn Global Campaign Manager

1600-1700 **Session 8 (a) –** Maya Banquet Hall

Theme: Enabling Environment for Domestic Resource Mobilisation and African Philanthropy **-** Blended finance, pooled/core support, and domestic fundraising pathways that stabilise CSOs and movement infrastructure.

Speakers

- **Ms. Grace Maingi,** Kenya Community Development Foundation, KCDF, Kenya
- **Hon. Victor Obuzor,** Chair, House Committee on Civil Society and Development Matters, National Assembly, Nigeria
- **Omar N'diaye,** Programme Officer, Ford Foundation, West Africa Office
- **Dr. Nana Afadzinu,** Executive Director, West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI)
- **Mr. Gima Forje,** Chief Executive Officer, TY Danjuma Foundation, Nigeria

Q & A, Comments, and Discussion in plenary
Chair – **Ms. Thelma Ekiyor-Solanke,** CEO, Women for Women International

1600-1700 **Session 8 (b) –** Naa Adjeley Hall

Host: Spaces for Change, West Africa

Theme: Intergenerational Bridge-building of Civil Society Leadership in West Africa

In this intergenerational exchange between veterans and present-day civic actors, session speakers and participants will unpack how past gains by veteran activists can inform and shape contemporary efforts to drive sustainable change in West Africa.

Speakers

- **Hon. Abdul Oroh,** Former President, CLO & Former House of Rep. Member - Nigeria
- **Hon. Justice Nkemdilim Izuako,** Former Judge of the United Nations Dispute Tribunal & S4C Global Board member
- **Dr Fatima Diallo,** Executive Director, CRADESC - Senegal
- **Hon Joe Ghartey,** former Deputy Speaker of Parliament of Ghana and Attorney General of Ghana
- **Mr. Rafiu Lawal,** Executive Director, BB4Peace West Africa

Q & A, Comments, and Discussion in plenary
Chair: **Mr. Joachim Onwe,** Communications Officer, S4C West Africa

1700-1710 **Ms. Loveth Liberty – Poet**
Title: In Another Story

1710-1730 **Closing Plenary: Dialogue Commitments and Way Forward**

Session will consolidate the key outcomes, recommendations, and commitments emerging from the dialogue. Facilitators will synthesise the main points from the various sessions into a concise set of actionable commitments.

Facilitators:

- **Prof. Charles Ukeje,** Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria
- **Ms. Aisha Dabo,** Coordinator, Africtivistes, Senegal

Vote of Thanks
West Africa Civil Society Institute & Spaces for Change

NETWORKING | ENDOFWESTAFRICACIVILSOCIETYWEEK



Delegation from Nigerian civil society, development partners, regulatory bodies, and the National Assembly at WACSW 2025

ANNEX

PARTICIPANTS



PARTICIPANTS' LIST

NO	NAME	ORGANISATION	COUNTRY
1	Abdul-Rashid Imoro	Inspire to Act	Ghana
2	Abiola Toyyibah Oluwapelumi	National Association of Ogun State Students	Nigeria
3	Adagher Aondona Kingsley	Noble Action for Peace and Empowerment Initiative	Nigeria
4	Adelaide Tetteh	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
5	Adelani David Oluwatodimu	Obafemi Awolowo University Students Union	Nigeria
6	Adio James Iyanuoluwa	Federal University Oye Ekiti Students' Union	Nigeria
7	Agnes Thomasi	West Africa Democracy Radio	Senegal
8	Ahmed Hamza Tijani	The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law	Ghana
9	Ahouefa Sossou	Centre de Documentation et de Formation sur les Droits de l'Homme	Togo
10	Aina Omolola Olumide	Gender Development Initiative	Nigeria
11	Aisha Dabo	AfricTivistes	Senegal
12	Alfred Ekeng	Nigerian National Assembly	Nigeria
13	Aliou Tine	Afrikajom Center	Senegal
14	Alnoudjim Tograbaye	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Chad
15	Ama Ekheoveh	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Nigeria
16	Amb. William Kanyirige	African Union	Ghana
17	Anatu Ben-Lawal	Social Innovation Africa	Ghana
18	Ankrah Adotévi	Katutu Civil Rights Center	Togo
19	Anthoniette Arhin	Healthy People Foundation	Ghana
20	Antoinette Mbrou	Women in Law and Development in Africa - West Africa	Togo
21	Asante Kwame	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
22	Azemse Charles	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
23	Baako Abdul-Fatawu	Centre for Capacity Improvement for the Wellbeing of the Vulnerable	Ghana
24	Beatrice Asamani Savage	Ghana News Agency	Ghana
25	Beauty Narteh	Ghana Ant-Corruption Coalition	Ghana
26	Benjamin Hadi Oboulbiga	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Burkina Faso
27	Benjamin Oluwashinaayomi Ogunfowora	Tai Solarin Federal University of Education Students Union	Nigeria
28	Bishop Akolgo	Integrated Social Development Centre	Ghana
29	Bless Ahiakonu	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
30	Bosede Muibi	Consultant	Nigeria
31	Braimah Sanjage	Centre for Social Mobilization and Suatainable Development	Ghana
32	Cephas Codjia	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
33	Charles Kojo Vandyck	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
34	Claudia Ewuakyewah Hayford	SHEDEV Foundation	Ghana

NO	NAME	ORGANISATION	COUNTRY
35	Cllr. Bornor M. Varmah	West Africa Bar Association	Liberia
36	David Quaye	Africa Governace Center	Ghana
37	Dayo Olaide	WACSI-Node Nigeria	Canada
38	Deborah Abbey	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
39	Dela Ashiagbor	Department of Social Welfare	Ghana
40	Dembo Bojang	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Gambia
41	Dinatu Dama Maji	Kasham Girls, Women, Youth and Community Development Initiative	Nigeria
42	Dorcas Coker Appiah	Gender Centre	Ghana
43	Dr Samuel Mawusi Asafo	Chartered Institute of Administrators and Management Consultants - Ghana	Ghana
44	Dr. Chukwuemeka Eze	Open Society Foundations	Senegal
45	Dr. Dirk Aßmann	German Development Cooperation	Ghana
46	Dr. Edward Ampratwum	United Nations Development Programme	Ghana
47	Dr. Emmanuel Akwetey	Institute for Democratic Governance	Ghana
48	Dr. Hussaini Abdu	WACSI-Node Nigeria	Nigeria
49	Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas	African Union	Ghana
50	Dr. Nana Asantewa Afadzinu	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
51	Dr. Nansata Yakubu	Conciliation Resources	Ghana
52	Dr. Rasheed Draman	African Centre for Paliamentry Affairs	Ghana
53	Dr. Samuel Oluwole Ojewale	Institute of Security Studies	Senegal
54	Dr. Vincent Azumah	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding	Ghana
55	Dr. Violet Makuku	Global Quality Assurance Association	Ghana
56	Dr. Yao Graham	Third World Network (TWN)	Ghana
57	Ebun Akin-Falaiye	Cooperative Federation of Nigeria	Nigeria
58	Eddie Jarwolo	NAYMOTE	Liberia
59	Edwin Zu-Cudjoe	Social Enterprise Ghana	Ghana
60	El Moctar Cissé	Collectif Cri du Cœur	Mali
61	Elom Ayale	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Togo
62	Emelia Mwinpog Dery	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
63	Emile Koukou Bela	African Development Bank	Cote d'Ivoire
64	Emmanuel Abayomi Akinseye	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Nigeria
65	Emmanuel Bensah	Independent	Ghana
66	Emmanuel Laryea	Ghana Society of the Physically Disabled	Ghana
67	Eric Saforo	Youth Opportunity and Transformation in Africa	Ghana
68	Esso-Dong Kongah	Centre de Documentation et de Formation sur les Droits de l'Homme	Togo
69	Esther Tawiah	Gender Centre for Empowering Development	Ghana
70	Farouk Alhassan	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
71	Fatima Diallo	Centre de Recherche et d'Action sur les Droits Économique Sociaux et Culturels	Senegal
72	Fatoumata Kombadouno	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
73	Felicia Anthonio	Access Now	Ghana

NO	NAME	ORGANISATION	COUNTRY
74	Femi Adeyeye	Fund Education Coalition	Nigeria
75	Fiifi Boateng	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
76	Franck Sombo	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Nigeria
77	Dayo Olaide	Amnesty International	Ghana
78	George Adu Mintah	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
79	George Idun Sam	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
80	Gideon Ahenkorah	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
81	Gima Forje	TY Danjuma Foundation	Nigeria
82	Gladys Odegbaro	Solicitors Department Federal Ministry of Justice Nigeria	Nigeria
83	Grace Maingi	Kenya Community Development Foundation	Kenya
84	Grace Ziggah	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
85	Harry Erin	EFCC Special Control Unit Against Money Laundering	Nigeria
86	Harry Udoh	Ethics and Good Leadership Awareness Initiative (EGLAI)	Nigeria
87	Hilder Achiro	Civic Advisory Hub	Uganda
88	Hon. Victor Obuzor	Nigerian National Assembly (House of Representatives)	Nigeria
89	Honesty Dzievenu	Youth Initiative	Ghana
90	Ibrahim Gbadago	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
91	Idamoko ThankGod	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Nigeria
92	Idem Udoekong	Internationa IDEA/EU CSO-Bridge	Nigeria
93	Inikpi Victoria Amodu	UNESCO Youth Orientation for Development	Nigeria
94	Innocent Adoh	Nigerian Women Trust Fund	Nigeria
95	Isaac Hubert Arthur	Center for International Trade	Nigeria
96	Jecinta Uzodinmma Theresa	Spaces for change	Nigeria
97	Jee-hyea Grace Arkoi	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Nigeria
98	Jeffery Adu-Yeboah	University of Ghana Students' Respresentative Council	Nigeria
99	Jemilatu Mashood	Catholic Relief Services	Nigeria
100	Jerry Sam	Penplusbytes	Nigeria
101	Jimm Fomunjong	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Nigeria
102	Joachim Onwe	Spaces for change	Nigeria
103	Joan Koomson	STAR-Ghana	Ghana
104	John Frinjuah	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
105	John Gbenagnon	Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement	Benin
106	John Nkaw	ActionAid Ghana	Ghana
107	Joke Aladesanmi	Center for Legal Support and Inmate Rehabilitation	Nigeria
108	Jonathan Naaba	Tree Aid	Ghana
109	Joseph Wemakor	Human Rights Reporters	Ghana
110	Josephine Mukakalisa	Right to play Ghana	Ghana

NO	NAME	ORGANISATION	COUNTRY
111	Joy Animah Debrah	Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice	Ghana
112	Joy Ijeoma	Women Empowerment Education and Peace Building Initiative	Nigeria
113	Joy Lawal	American Business Council	Nigeria
114	Joyce Ekuful	Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) West Africa Office	Ghana
115	Joyce Mensah	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
116	Joyland Mensah	Ghana Union of Professional Studies	Ghana
117	Juliet A. Amoah	Emerging Public Leaders of Ghana	Ghana
118	Justice Nkemdilim Izuako	Spaces for Change	Nigeria
119	Juwon Sanyaolu	Take It Back Movement	Nigeria
120	Kasavubu Mordzi	Common Action for Rural Development	Ghana
121	Katherine Adarkwa	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
122	Kirchuffs Atengble	PACKS Africa	Ghana
123	Kofi Awity	Placement Ghana	Ghana
124	Koniba Samaké	Tribune Jeune pour le Droit au Mali	Mali
125	Kopep Dabugat	Center for Innovative Governance and Sustainable Development	Nigeria
126	Kossi Afan	Katutu Civil Rights Center	Togo
127	Kwabena Kroduah	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
128	Kwaku Gyau Baffour	Ghana Bar Association	Ghana
129	Kwame Bethel	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
130	Kwame Nkrumah	Katutu Civil Rights Center	Ghana
131	Laurelle SAÏD	Katutu Civil Rights Center	Togo
132	Lawrencia Gyanwah Bonsu	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
133	Leandre Banon	One Family Foundation	Ghana
134	Levlyn Konadu Asiedu	Sustainable Development Goals Platform	Ghana
135	Liberty Loveth	Poet	Nigeria
136	Mabel Shu	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
137	Madi Jobarteh	Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice	Gambia
138	Magda Lopes	West Africa Civil Society Insitute - Board	Senegal
139	Makmid Kamara	International Fund for Public Interest Media	Ghana
140	Mamadou - Mignane Diouf	ONG Plateforme d'Action pour l'Éducation au Développement Durable	Senegal
141	Mamane Kaka Touda	Alternative Espaces Citoyen	Niger
142	Marcella Samba-Sesay	Campaign for Good Governance	Sierra Leone
143	Mary Awelana Addah	Ghana Intergrity Initiative	Ghana
144	Mary Okpe	Centre for Democracy and Deevelopment West Africa	Nigeria
145	Mawuli Dake	Moremi Initiative	Ghana
146	Melissa Simo	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
147	Mercy Catherine Adjabeng	Alliance for Women in Media	Ghana
148	Michael Ohene-Effah	LeadAfrique	Ghana
149	Micheal Kumodzi	West Africa Drug Policy Network	Ghana

NO	NAME	ORGANISATION	COUNTRY
150	Mohamed B. Fadiga	Renforcer les Droits Civiques (Benin/Senegal)	Senegal
151	Mohammed Awal Alhassan	Norsaac	Ghana
152	Mohammed-Anwar Sadat Adam	OXFAM Ghana	Ghana
153	Moussa Bienvenu Haba	Lawyers Without Borders Canada	Canada
154	Moussiliou Alidou	West Africa Civil Society Institute - Board	Benin
155	Ms. Maame Awinador-Kanyirige	Genesis Analytics	Ghana
156	Naa Ashorkor Ashittey	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
157	Naa Dedei Tetteh	West Africa Democracy Radio	Ghana
158	Nancy Kamkam-Kusi	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
159	Naomi Ayot Oyaro	Community Action for Passionate Development and AIDS Support	Uganda
160	Nii Doodo	British Council	Ghana
161	Obiageli Mary	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
162	Oladepo Joshua Temitope	Alliance of Nigerian Students Against Neo liberal Attacks	Nigeria
163	Oliver, Barker-Vormawor	Fix the Country Movement	Ghana
164	Olóyè Akolawole Shoremi	National Youth Council of Nigeria	Nigeria
165	Olufunmilayo Akinyele	CSO Accountability and Transparency Initiative (CATI)	Nigeria
166	Oluwaseyi Tetteh	International IDEA/EU-CSO Bridge	Nigeria
167	Omolara Balogun	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
168	Oyebisi Babatunde Oluseyi	Nigeria Network of NGOs	Nigeria
169	Oyelowo Bolanle Olayinka	Gender Development Initiative	Nigeria
170	Patricia Akakpo	Domestic Voilence Coalition	Ghana
171	Patrick Allam	Spaces for Change	Nigeria
172	Patrick Kofi Adu	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
173	Paul Osei-Kuffour	West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network	Ghana
174	Peret Lovina Amos	Plateau State University Student's Union Government	Nigeria
175	Precious Ankomah	Penplusbytes	Ghana
176	Prince Akpah	Katutu Civil Rights Center	Togo
177	Prince Stephen Bentil	University of Professional Studies Students' Represenntative Council	Ghana
178	Prof. Akin Iwilade	University of Edinburg	United Kingdom
179	Prof. Charles Ukeje	Obafemi Awolowo University	Nigeria
180	Prof. Kwame Karikari	Media Foundation for West Africa - Fellow	Ghana
181	Prof. Nana Tanko	Victims Support Fund	Nigeria
182	Prof. Olubunmi Ashimolowo	Gender Development Initiative	Nigeria
183	Prof. Oumar Ndongo	Cheikh Anta Diop University	Senegal
184	Purity Murugu	Kenya Community Development Foundation	Kenya
185	Rabiu Alhassan	FactSpace West Africa	Ghana

NO	NAME	ORGANISATION	COUNTRY
186	Rafiu Lawal	Building Blocks for Peace Foundation	Nigeria
187	Rejoice Imozemeh	Spaces for Change	Nigeria
188	Richard Arhin	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
189	Rosemond Ansah	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
190	Rotimi Olawale	YouthHub Africa	Nigeria
191	Ruth Yakana	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
192	Salisu Abubakar	Corporate Affairs Commission Nigeria	Nigeria
193	Sammy Obeng	Parliamentary Netwrok Africa	Ghana
194	Samson Abayomi Soyinka	Gender Development Initiative	Nigeria
195	Samuel Boateng	CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation	Ghana
196	Samuel Thompson Essel	Financial Intelligence Centre	Ghana
197	Selasie Kwame Atamugzi	GIMPA Students' Representative Council	Ghana
198	Sherifatu Yakubu	SHE 360 LBG	Ghana
199	Shirley Ferguson	Law and Development Associates	Ghana
200	Siapha Kamara	SEND Ghana	Ghana
201	Sirina Mahamadu	Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations	Ghana
202	Sola Olutayo	Spaces for Change	Nigeria
203	Sonny Onyegbula	Spaces for Change	Nigeria
204	Souleymane Ouedraogo	Balai Citoyen	Burkina Faso
205	Stephen Dadzie	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
206	Susan Imohiosen	Nigerian Women Trust Fund	Nigeria
207	Teiko Sabah	Presbyterian Relief Services and Development	Ghana
208	Thelma Ekiyor-Solanke	Women for Women International	Nigeria
209	Thomas Musah	Ghana National Association of Teachers	Ghana
210	Timothy Mensah Smith	Roots Link Africa	Ghana
211	Tomisin Fasola	Spaces for Change	Ghana
212	Vanessa Agyei-Essiful	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
213	Vivian Affoah	Media Foundation for West Africa	Ghana
214	Whitnay Segnonna	West Africa Civil Society Institute	Ghana
215	Yansane Fatou Balde	Coalition des Femmes Leaders de Guinée	Guinea
216	Zainab Onuh-Yahaya	PILnet: The Global Network for Public Interest Law	Nigeria



3RD WEST AFRICA CIVIL SOCIETY WEEK

Redefining Civil Society And The Future Of Democratic Resilience In West Africa

2025

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