



ECOSOCC
Economic Social & Cultural Council

The voice of the
African Citizenry



ECOSOCC
CITIZENS' FORUM

Malabo, Equatorial Guinea 2025

OUTCOME DOCUMENT

**Reimagining Democracy and Advancing
Reparative Justice: A New Social Contract**
8–9 July 2025



1. Introduction

The African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) convened the 2025 Citizens' Forum on 8–9 July 2025 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. The Forum was held on the margins of the 7th Mid-Year Coordination Meeting between the African Union, the Regional Economic Communities and the Regional Mechanisms. The theme of the Forum was “Reimagining Democracy and Advancing Reparative Justice: A New Social Contract”

The main objectives of the Forum were to:

- Rethink the evolution and practice of democracy from the perspective of Africa's lived realities;
- Confront structural and historical injustices through a reparative lens,
- Mobilise African citizens agency towards transformation of the multilateral system through United Nations Charter Review invoking Article 109;
- Explore the role of civil society, cultural leaders, faith based and communities in shaping a new social contract between governments and their people;
- Identify innovative pathways to restore and advance civic trust, inclusive governance, and participatory reparative justice.
- Develop a shared agenda and actionable policy recommendations to be transmitted to the AU Summit of Heads of State and Government; and
- Inform ongoing processes in the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the AU 2025 theme of the year *Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through reparations*.

The Forum brought together representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs), grassroots movements, AU organs, regional economic communities (RECs), international development partners, faith-based institutions, youth and women networks, academic and cultural actors. The Forum underscored the urgency of reviving and strengthening a democratic and justice architecture truly reflective of Africa's cultural, historical, socio-economic and political contexts.

The Citizens' Forum included high-level plenaries and thematic panel sessions across six inter-connected pillars.

- Role of civil society in a reparative future;
- Reimagining global and continental governance;
- Climate resilience and a just green transition;
- Health sovereignty and equity;
- Fiscal justice and illicit financial flows (IFFs); and
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) for good governance and civil society empowerment.

This report is a synthesis of the proceedings, key outcomes and emerging policy recommendation of the Forum. Its structured in the six parts as per the Forum sessions.

2. Opening Session

Opening remarks were delivered by Mr. William Carew, Head of Secretariat at ECOSOCC; Mr. Augustin Núñez Vicandi on behalf of Ambassador António de Almeida-Ribeiro, Acting Secretary General of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID); Mr. Oliver Röpke, President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Mr. Louis Cheick Sissoko, Presiding Officer of ECOSOCC opened the Forum. A keynote statement was delivered by H.E. Mehdi Jomaa, Former Prime Minister of the Republic of Tunisia and Member of Club de Madrid, who underscored the imperative of reimagining democracy, by critically challenging models imported into the continent, and by drawing upon Africa's cultural, social, and historical realities. In his remarks, he reaffirmed the critical role of inclusive civic participation, intergenerational dialogue, and sustained solidarity as foundations for building resilient people-centred democratic institutions across the continent.

The session also featured the official launch of the ECOSOCC Civil Society Compendium, titled *"My Africa, My Future,"* presented by H.E. Mehdi Jomaa. The publication seeks to amplify the contributions of African civil society actors, document innovative practices across regions, and provide a comprehensive reference point to guide future civic engagement within AU frameworks.

The session further highlighted the view that democracy in Africa must transcend periodic electoral events and become anchored in regular and ongoing citizen participation and engagement in the governance of their countries. The Forum reaffirmed that justice should extend beyond courtroom verdicts to become a holistic process of healing, truth-telling, societal restoration and non-repetition, thereby aligning closely with the aspirations of AU Agenda 2063 and the AU 2025 theme of the year on Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations.

The opening ceremony emphasized the imperative of dismantling colonial legacies in national and global governance, addressing enduring inequalities, and institutionalizing dignity and belonging as pillars of Africa's democratic renewal. It further reflected upon the urgency and broad ownership required to reimagine democracy and justice in Africa.

Collectively, the opening messages framed the Forum's mission: to move beyond superficial democratic rituals toward crafting actionable, culturally resonant strategies that embed

reparative justice, community healing, and relational governance at the heart of Africa's evolving social contract.

3. Setting the Scene — Reimagining Democracy and Advancing Reparative Justice

The session underscored that Africa's democracy often mirrors borrowed institutional models, heavily influenced by colonial legacies, and largely disconnected from the daily struggles and realities of Africa's citizens. Participants collectively reaffirmed the need to move beyond electoral cycles as mere periodic spectacles, advocating instead for a democracy that is anchored on regular and ongoing citizen participation and engagement in a manner that transforms community life.

- Several speakers highlighted that justice must extend well beyond punitive courtroom verdicts. They called for a paradigm shift towards holistic justice that centers healing, truth-telling, restitution, societal repair, and emotional restoration.
- The AU Agenda 2063 and the AU's 2025 theme on justice and reparations were cited as vital continental anchors that should guide efforts to build inclusive, restorative, and future-focused governance frameworks.
- Participants called attention to the profound gap between policy structures and cultural legitimacy, emphasizing that democracy must resonate with African idioms, rituals, and collective memories to truly thrive.

Emerging Issues:

- Persistent elitism, misuse of state institutions, corruption, lack of respect for the rule of law, credential bias, and tokenism in governance spaces were identified as deep-rooted impediments, where individuals closest to societal problems remain structurally excluded from decision-making tables.
- The alienation produced by governance frameworks delivered primarily in colonial languages and technical jargon was raised repeatedly, highlighting how this systematically disenfranchises a majority of citizens who do not speak the language of power.
- Civic fatigue emerged as a recurring concern, with participants voicing frustration over repeated consultations that yield little tangible change, leading to widespread public disillusionment and disengagement.

Policy Recommendations:

- Build innovative “access infrastructures” including mobile civic hubs, localized radio forums, storytelling buses, and artistic festivals to democratize engagement and physically bridge the gap between policy spaces and grassroots communities.
- Develop and train a new cadre of “Civic Translators” tasked with localizing governance discourse into Indigenous languages, metaphors, and cultural narratives, thereby enhancing comprehension, resonance, and legitimacy.
- Institutionalize healing rituals, memory work, artistic expressions, and community truth-telling forums as formal, recognized components of governance processes to foster societal repair and embed participatory democracy in lived realities.
- Strengthen the linkage between Agenda 2063 aspirations and community-led initiatives by systematically embedding continental priorities into local participatory mechanisms.

4. The Role of Civil Society in a Reparative Future

The session explored the indispensable role of civil society organizations (CSOs), community actors, and diaspora institutions in advocating for reparative justice and advancing a new social contract rooted in dignity, collective healing and just global order.

- The discussions emphasized that Africa’s democracy suffers from a “proximity paradox,” where those bearing the brunt of policy failures — such as informal workers, rural women, and youth are systematically excluded from shaping governance decisions.
- Participants highlighted the urgent need to move from mere consultations to meaningful co-creation, underscoring that communities should not just be invited after decisions are made but should serve as proactive actors in debating and designing national, continental and governance policies from inception.
- There was a collective call to dismantle the hierarchy of legitimacy that privileges formal credentials over lived experience, recognizing that those with first-hand exposure to injustice often possess the most profound insights into solutions.
- Speakers championed innovative concepts such as “Civic Imaginators” local thinkers and artists who help communities envision alternative futures and “truth circles” as safe spaces for storytelling, emotional trauma-release, and intergenerational healing.

Emerging Issues:

- Deep civic fatigue was identified as a growing concern, driven by performative engagement where citizens are paid lip-service and only occasionally “consulted but not considered.
- Tokenism, especially towards women and youth, was flagged as a persistent barrier, with many serving as symbolic participants rather than substantive decision-makers.

- The prioritization of formal education over community wisdom continues to marginalize informal actors who hold rich contextual knowledge.
- The mental health toll of civic engagement including burnout, grief, and anger emerged as a critical, often overlooked, challenge within activism and community organizing.

Policy Recommendations:

- Institutionalize co-creation mechanisms that insert community actors at every stage of policy design, moving beyond consultation to genuine knowledge transmission and power-sharing in shaping ideas to uplift the African continent.
- Establish dedicated platforms for “truth circles” and community memory work, integrating these as standard practices in governance and justice processes.
- Launch targeted initiatives to identify, train, and support “Civic Imaginators” individuals within communities who can dream up new systems and practices, thereby strengthening civic innovation from the ground up.
- Mainstream wellness and psychosocial mental health and trauma-healing support into civic and advocacy spaces, recognizing that healing is integral to sustaining long-term engagement.
- Adopt frameworks that validate expertise derived from lived experience equally alongside academic or professional qualifications, disrupting entrenched credential hierarchies.

5. Reimagining Global and Continental Governance

The session engaged with Africa’s marginalization within global governance systems, drawing upon the OAU 1993 Abuja Proclamation on Reparations, and examined pathways to reposition the continent as an agenda-setter rather than a passive rule-taker.

The session discussed the importance of Africa taking a lead in invoking Article 109, of the United Nations Charter to convene a General Conference to Review the United Nations Charter as a pathway to the reform of the UN Security Council, as well as the global financial architecture.

The session discussed how Africa can approach the issue of UN Security Council reform with one voice, by designating the AU Peace and Security Council to represent the continent at the Permanent Membership of the UNSC. The modalities of how the 15 members of the AU PSC will represent the continent at the UNSC will be determined through a rotational basis, which will

ensure that all Council members will be able to actively represent Africa through the Permanent Membership of the UNSC.

- Participants discussed the troubling reality that democracy across many African nations is often externally benchmarked against Euro-American standards, a residual legacy of colonialism and the Cold War which undermines the legitimacy of homegrown governance models.
- The dialogue emphasized the critical importance of defining African democracy on its own philosophical, cultural, historical, socio-economic and political terms, thereby resisting the imposition of models from outside the continent.
- The notion that “democracy is a lifestyle, not an event” was reinforced, underlining that authentic democracy must be experienced daily through cultural practices, community interactions, and relational governance rather than being reduced to episodic electoral rituals.
- Concerns were also raised about Africa’s reactive stance in global systems, perpetually mobilizing in response to crises instead of proactively shaping international agendas.

Emerging Issues:

- Africa continues to experience a “democracy gap,” with governance largely delivered through top-down instructions rather than reciprocal dialogue, at the national, continental and global level, leaving citizens feeling unseen and unheard.
- A significant absence of “civic memory” was highlighted, where societies fail to honor those who historically fought for rights and justice, against slavery, colonialism and apartheid leading to repeated civic mistakes and a detachment from people-led struggles.
- Emotional exclusion was identified as a structural flaw in governance processes, with little space for communities to express grief, anger, or even joy related to policy impacts.

Policy Recommendations:

- Designate a core group of AU Member States to build a coalition of the willing at the UN General Assembly to invoke Article 109, of the United Nations Charter to convene a General Conference to Review the United Nations Charter, as a pathway to the reform of the UN Security Council, as well as the global financial architecture.
- Designate the AU Peace and Security Council to represent the continent at the Permanent Membership of the UNSC.
- Promote democratic revival and pluralism by empowering each African context to define justice, participation, and governance on its own terms, decoupled from imposed external benchmarks.

- Integrate civic memory into national and continental frameworks, establishing initiatives that honor past civic champions and embed historical consciousness in policymaking.
- Institutionalize “emotional governance” by creating policy spaces where communities can safely express emotions, ensuring governance becomes a site of belonging and not just procedural compliance.
- Build structures that democratize not only institutions but mindsets — fostering a culture where every individual feels they are a political actor, not solely those in elected office

6. Climate Resilience and Just Green Transition

The session foregrounded the urgency of addressing Africa's climate crisis through a justice-based lens. Framed by the lived experiences of communities, speakers emphasized that climate resilience must be co-created, culturally rooted, and emotionally reparative. The dominant narrative of technocratic adaptation was challenged, with a strong call to reposition climate policy as both a spiritual and political project.

- The language of climate policy is alienating. Local metaphors, oral traditions, and seasonal rituals were highlighted as key to demystifying climate discourse.
- Structural injustice persists in green transitions. Participants warned that top-down models risk replicating colonial extractive logics unless they are rooted in community co-ownership.
- Grief, displacement, and generational trauma were cited as core components of climate vulnerability. The session emphasized the need for **emotional ecology** and ritual as part of resilience-building.
- African youth face emotional burnout, limited decision-making power, and tokenistic inclusion in green spaces. They called for dedicated, resourced leadership spaces.
- Carbon offset schemes were widely critiqued for commodifying pollution while displacing Indigenous and frontline communities
- Traditional ecological knowledge—often dismissed as folklore—was uplifted as systematic, climate-adaptive wisdom.

Emerging Issues:

- Climate finance often perpetuates debt dependency through predatory lending models.
- Customary land rights are threatened by speculative green investments.
- Data extraction and donor-driven reporting metrics marginalize community innovations.
- Communities are framed as victims rather than agents of ingenuity.

Policy Recommendations:

- Translate climate narratives into local languages and performative mediums (theatre, song, oral storytelling).
- Institutionalize healing rituals, storytelling circles, and spiritual ceremonies as formal components of climate resilience programming.

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- Establish Youth Climate Healing Hubs to integrate skill-building, psychosocial support, and participatory budgeting.
- Suspend carbon offset mechanisms until free, prior, and informed consent from impacted communities is obtained.
- Recognize and integrate customary land tenure systems into national and regional climate policies.
- Establish an African Ecological Knowledge Archive to document and mainstream Indigenous climate practices.
- Design Fiscal Return Maps to transparently track climate investments and show tangible local return

7. Health Sovereignty and Equity

The session reframed health as a function of dignity, sovereignty, and justice. Participants interrogated the enduring legacy of colonialism in global health architectures, critiqued extractive research paradigms, and emphasized the need for pluralistic, community-rooted care systems.

- Participants declared that health is when people do not have to choose between food and medicine, highlighting the intersection of health with economic and nutritional security.
- Global aid models were critiqued for enforcing vertical, disease-specific interventions that ignore holistic wellbeing.
- Traditional medicine was uplifted as legitimate science, with calls to integrate herbalists, elders, and spiritual leaders into the formal health system.
- Community health workers (CHWs) shared testimonies of burnout, invisibility, and emotional exhaustion, demanding recognition and fair compensation.
- The commodification of African bodies and data in global medical research was condemned as biological and intellectual extraction.
- Health was framed as a site of sovereignty, where communities must co-design care systems based on cultural logic, not donor metrics.

Emerging Issues:

- Surveillance-heavy global health strategies replace solidarity with control.
- Visa regimes prevent access to urgent cross-border healthcare.
- Privatization deepens inequity, making health a privilege rather than a right.
- Monitoring systems ignore emotional and psychological needs.

Policy Recommendations:

- Integrate traditional healing and allocate dedicated funding for its practice within public health systems.
- Institutionalize mental health and spiritual support for frontline health workers.

- Require benefit-sharing clauses in all global research contracts using African data or participation.
- Develop regional healthcare mobility corridors to facilitate seamless access to treatment across borders.
- Fund grassroots-led healthcare models and community healing networks already providing effective care.
- Codify constitutional health rights paired with budget allocations.
- Center storytelling, civic education, and participatory budgeting in health planning.

8. Fiscal Justice, Transparency and Illicit Financial Flows

The session addressed civil society's role in combating illicit financial flows, advancing tax justice, and strengthening public financial accountability across the continent. Speakers framed the importance of public policy and regulations to ensure sustainable resources mobilisation for financing national development plans and Agenda 2063.

Emerging Issues

- Public distrust in taxation systems, driven by poor service visibility and elite capture.
- Over-taxation of informal and survivalist economies without corresponding benefits or protections.
- Fiscal centralization undermines local autonomy and responsiveness.
- Absence of whistleblower protection, leading to civic fear and institutional silence.
- Opaque, technocratic language that excludes citizens from fiscal discourse.
- Unjust data practices, where communities have no access to the fiscal information they generate.
- Donor hypocrisy in fiscal compliance, with harsher requirements for grassroots projects than for multinational IFFs.
- Lack of traceability in budget use, especially at the local level.
- Environmental neglect in fiscal planning, with limited support for climate-resilient local food systems.

Policy Recommendations

- Translate fiscal policy into accessible, culturally resonant forms including Indigenous languages, theatre, radio drama, and storytelling.
- Treat taxpayers as stakeholders through participatory education, localized fiscal feedback loops, and transparent reporting.
- Empower municipalities by matching local mandates with adequate resources and allowing for community-designed tax regimes.
- Institutionalize protections for whistleblowers, including legal anonymity, economic rehabilitation, and social support mechanisms.
- Audit and reform local government levies to eliminate coercive, duplicative, and informal taxation particularly for women and youth in the informal economy.

- Shift donor frameworks from punitive compliance to collaborative accountability, with a focus on outcomes and equity.
- Democratize fiscal data by building local dashboards and tools for community ownership, analysis, and decision-making.
- Support regenerative agriculture by redirecting subsidies to local, climate-resilient food systems and recognizing farmers as fiscal stakeholders.
- Develop and deploy Fiscal Return Maps to show communities how taxes fund services using visual, mobile, and performative mediums.
- Embed rights-based fiscal frameworks into national law, enabling communities to challenge unjust taxation and resource allocation through legal standing.

9. AI For Good Governance and Civil Society Empowerment

The session addressed the fast-evolving role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in governance and civic life across Africa. Speakers framed AI as a double-edged sword capable of deepening exclusion and surveillance if unregulated, but also powerful in enabling transparency, civic empowerment, and participatory governance when ethically designed.

- AI systems developed in the Global North often reinforce data colonialism, reflecting biased datasets that fail to capture African contexts or languages.
- Speakers flagged the misuse of facial recognition, predictive policing, and opaque algorithmic decision-making in suppressing civic freedoms.
- Civil society actors highlighted innovative tools such as Citizens-to-Parliament and Voters Compass, which leverage civic tech to enhance informed public participation and build democratic feedback loops.
- Code for Africa shared insights into AI-driven investigative tools that monitor disinformation, political accountability, and digital exclusion.
- A recurring call was for AI literacy and public education, with special emphasis on community co-design and local language access.
- Speakers advocated for the decolonization of digital governance, where AI reflects Ubuntu ethics, transparency, and collective agency.

Emerging Issues:

- African languages are grossly underrepresented in AI tools.
- Governments increasingly deploy AI to surveil and suppress dissenting CSOs.
- Civil society lacks the infrastructure to train, own, or shape AI tools.
- AI policies are often passed without public debate or inclusive frameworks.

Policy Recommendations:

- Establish Multi-Stakeholder AI Governance Councils inclusive of CSOs, technologists, regulators, artists, and Indigenous communities.
- Launch AI Literacy Labs using participatory tools (games, drama, digital storytelling) in local languages.

- Develop and adopt an African AI Bill of Rights to protect against algorithmic harm and exclusion.
- Enforce moratoriums on surveillance AI until independent human rights audits are conducted.
- Institutionalize auditable, explainable, and challengeable public sector AI systems.
- Create a Continental Data Solidarity Pact ensuring ethical data ownership, reparations for digital exploitation, and community control of data.
- Elevate civic technologists, poets, artists, and local innovators as co-authors of ethical AI that reflects Africa's sociocultural realities

10. Closing Remarks - Key Messages and Way Forward

Closing remarks were delivered by:

- Mr. Omar Farouk Osman, President of the Federation of African Journalists
- Ambassador Amr Aljowaily, Director of the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO), African Union Commission
- Mr. William Carew, Head of Secretariat, ECOSOCC
- Mr. Louis Cheick Sissoko, Presiding Officer, ECOSOCC

The session distilled the Forum's rich dialogues into a unified and forward-looking civic commitment. It reaffirmed that:

- Africa's democratic future must be authored by Africans, grounded in indigenous civic rhythms and not borrowed templates.
- Democracy must be lived daily expressed through relationships, memory, emotional resonance, and local spaces not merely performed through episodic electoral events.
- Healing, storytelling, and cultural rituals were recognized as foundational democratic practices, not peripheral aesthetics.

Forum Outcome Statement and Commitments:

The Forum culminated in the adoption of a comprehensive Outcome Statement that lays out a civic roadmap to:

- Reimagine democracy as a relational, culturally anchored, and participatory process
- Advance reparative justice that addresses both historical legacies and ongoing structural inequities
- Integrate climate resilience and health sovereignty into governance models
- Safeguard Africa's digital commons and develop people-centered AI governance
- Empower youth, women, and marginalized groups as co-architects of the social contract

The Outcome Document further calls on AU Member States to:

- Institutionalize participatory governance and transitional justice mechanisms rooted in memory and culture
- Advocate for fair tax and debt regimes that prioritize people over profit

- Champion reform of global governance, including the UN Security Council and the international financial architecture
- Enable and respect digital civic space, civic technology innovations and e-governance approaches that are inclusive, responsive, transparent and accountable.
- Equip ECOSOCC with the political and financial tools required to fulfill its mandate
- Anchor citizen voices systematically into all AU policy cycles and multilateral negotiations
- Call on AU health institutions to revamp CSO engagement frameworks and adopt systemic and institutional reforms towards reparative justice by championing debt-health swaps, debt to climate swaps and pandemic funding

Way Forward:

As the Forum concluded, participants departed Malabo energized and united, committed to advancing the shared priorities captured in the Outcome Statement. These commitments will inform:

- The development of a concise policy paper encapsulating Forum recommendations for submission to AU statutory bodies and integration into Agenda 2063 implementation tracks;
- National and regional democratic reforms, and Africa's unified advocacy positions in global platforms including COP30, the UN Second World Summit for Social Development, and South Africa's G20 presidency;
- Continental advocacy on key justice and governance issues, including UN Security Council reform through invocation of Article 109 of the UN Charter, climate reparations, inclusive digital governance and the protection of Africa's digital sovereignty;
- Allocate more resources to the AU-Civic Tech Fund and replicate it at the regional and national levels as commitment to Africa's digital transformation and support for citizen-led innovation.
- Commitments from AU organs, RECs, and Member States to mainstream gender, youth, and healing-centred approaches within reparative justice frameworks;
- The advancement of people-to-people solidarity platforms that transcend linguistic, regional, and generational divides, ensuring Africa's evolving social contract reflects the lived realities and aspirations of its diverse peoples.

Through these strategic actions, the 4th ECOSOCC Citizens' Forum affirmed that Africa will continue to rise on its own terms in cultural memory, ecological balance, and the sovereign agency of its citizens, and propelled by a shared vision for a just, democratic, and reparative future.

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