

THE GLOBAL DEMOCRACY COALITION (GDC) AFRICA REGIONAL FORUM **2025**

DATE:
MARCH 28TH, 2025

VENUE:
**DAYSTAR UNIVERSITY,
NAIROBI KENYA**

In Partnership with:

Centre for
Multiparty  Democracy Kenya



THE GLOBAL DEMOCRACY COALITION (GDC) AFRICA REGIONAL FORUM 2025

Theme

ADVANCING DEMOCRATIC
RESILIENCE AT THE INTERSECTION
OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Sub Theme

COMBATING CORRUPTION AS A
CATALYST FOR DEMOCRATIC
RENEWAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL
RESILIENCE

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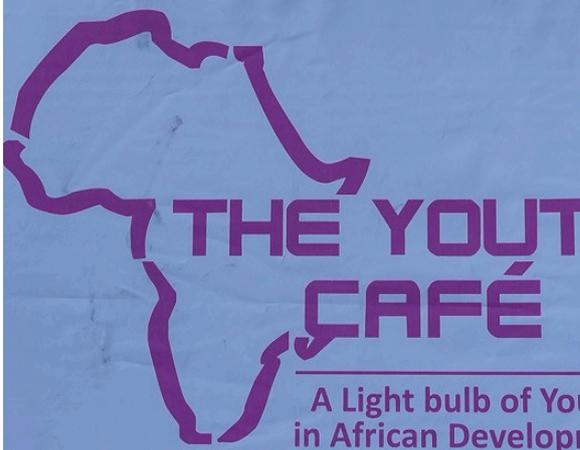
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Activity Summary

Name of activity	GLOBAL DEMOCRACY COALITION AFRICA REGIONAL FORUM 2025
Date of Activity	28 March, 2025
Type of Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum • Stakeholder engagement • Advocacy Civic • Engagement
Gender	
Male	89
Female	139
Other	N/A
Category	
Youth (18-35)	204
Women	139
Persons with Disability	3
Other	N/A



Background

The Youth Café, in partnership with four esteemed organizations—Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA), Committee Action for Health and Development (CAHED), Citizen Voice and Action (CVA) and Afrobarometer—convened the Global Democracy Coalition (GDC) Africa Forum 2025 on March 28, 2025, at Daystar University, Nairobi. This high-level forum brought together key stakeholders, including civil society organizations (CSOs), policymakers, youth movements and democracy advocates, from 14 African countries, to address pressing challenges at the intersection of democratic governance, human rights, and environmental justice.

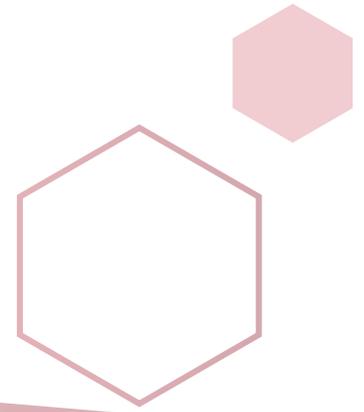
Under the theme "Advancing Democratic Resilience at the Intersection of Human Rights and Environmental Justice," the forum provided a platform for critical discussions on corruption, electoral integrity, youth engagement, and climate governance. The deliberations underscored the urgency of combating corruption as a catalyst for democratic renewal and environmental resilience, highlighting systemic governance failures, barriers to youth participation, and the role of campaign financing in perpetuating political corruption.

The 1-day forum was designed to be a hybrid event, offering in-person and virtual participation options. The physical event was hosted at Daystar University, Nairobi Kenya, providing an opportunity for direct engagement and collaboration. The hybrid format enabled the inclusion of a broader audience, reaching participants regionally.

This report captures key discussions, insights, and recommendations from the forum, providing a roadmap for actionable reforms to strengthen democratic institutions, enhance accountability, and drive inclusive environmental governance across Africa.



STRUCTURE OF ACTIVITIES



The GDC Africa Forum 2025, held on March 28, 2025, at Daystar University, Nairobi, brought together civil society leaders, policymakers, youth advocates, and democracy champions to explore the intersection of democracy, human rights, and environmental justice.

The forum was structured into keynote speeches, panel discussions, breakout sessions, and interactive sessions, fostering a high-level, solution-driven dialogue. The forum began with welcome remarks from The Youth Café and its partners, emphasizing the urgent need to address corruption, youth exclusion, and environmental injustices in Africa's governance landscape. Keynote speakers provided insights on strengthening democratic institutions, advancing human rights, and promoting environmental justice, setting the tone for the discussions ahead.

The first high-level panel discussion examined how corruption undermines democracy and weakens environmental resilience. Speakers highlighted the links between governance failures, climate inaction, and human rights violations, calling for stronger accountability mechanisms. Discussions focused on enhancing climate justice through transparent governance, reducing political corruption, and amplifying the role of civil society and youth in advocating for accountability.

An interactive World Café session allowed participants to engage in group discussions, each moderated by experts. Topics explored included strengthening democratic institutions, advancing environmental justice, and increasing youth participation in governance. Participants shared best practices, identified key challenges, and proposed actionable solutions. Each group later synthesized their takeaways and presented them in the plenary session.

The second panel focused on corruption as a major obstacle to democratic progress, with a special emphasis on campaign financing as a driver of political corruption. Discussions addressed the role of anti-corruption agencies, legal reforms, and electoral transparency in curbing financial misconduct in politics. Participants also explored strategies for ensuring fair electoral processes, strengthening accountability in government spending, and promoting ethical leadership.

A global panel discussion tackled the structural and systemic challenges preventing youth from engaging in political and governance processes. Key barriers highlighted included electoral injustices, political violence, misinformation, lack of civic education, and restrictive legal frameworks. The session underscored the need for bold youth advocacy, digital mobilization, and targeted policy reforms to create an enabling environment for young people to participate meaningfully in governance.

Throughout the day, online campaigns harnessed the power of social media and digital platforms to run awareness campaigns, encourage public discussions, and engage citizens in dialogue about democracy. The hashtags #GDCForum2025, #ThankYouDemocracy #AfricaGDCForum #AntiCorruption, #GoodGovernance #Accountability, #CivicEngagement, #Transparency, #EnvironmentalJustice and #HumanRights trended, amplifying the forum's impact.

Participants also had the opportunity to be interviewed by Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), Kenya Television Network (KTN), NTV Kenya and TV47 where they aired their views on youth governance in Africa and the necessary steps to ensure youth inclusion in all matters. We also conducted interviews with participants, gathering valuable feedback on their takeaways and thoughts on democracy in Africa.

In summary, The Global Democracy Coalition Africa Forum 2025 served as a powerful platform for dialogue and action, equipping participants with practical strategies to combat corruption, advocate for environmental justice, and strengthen democratic institutions. The insights generated during the forum will drive policy reforms and civic engagement efforts, ensuring that youth remain at the forefront of Africa's democratic renewal.



OPENING REMARKS

Maxmillian Ochango Ambeba, GDC Africa Forum Event Coordinator - Senior Program officer Democracy Governance Human Rights Innovation & Electoral Reforms at The Youth Cafe

Maxmillian Ochango Ambeba, Senior Programs Officer – Democracy, Governance, Human Rights, and Electoral Reforms at The Youth Café and GDC Africa Forum Events Coordinator, delivered the welcome speech at the Global Democracy Coalition (GDC) Africa Forum 2025. The event brought together distinguished guests, esteemed panelists, partners, democracy advocates, and youth leaders to discuss the state of democracy in Africa.

Ambeba expressed immense joy and gratitude in welcoming participants to the forum, emphasizing that it was more than just an event—it was a bold statement of Africa’s democratic resilience and commitment to governance that serves its people. He highlighted Africa’s current political landscape, referencing youth-led protests for accountability, civic movements demanding reforms, and resistance to authoritarian backsliding. He cited the impact of Kenya’s Gen Zs in reshaping the political discourse, alongside similar democratic movements in Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, and Sudan. These events, he noted, signified a continent-wide awakening and a growing demand for participatory, just, and inclusive democracy.

The theme of the forum, ‘Advancing Democratic Resilience at the Intersection of Human Rights and Environmental Justice in Africa,’ was described as a call to action. Ambeba emphasized that democracy thrives when human rights are protected, governance is accountable, and policies reflect the people’s aspirations. He acknowledged the complex challenges facing Africa, including democratic erosion, climate injustices, economic inequalities, and threats to freedom of expression. Rather than viewing these as obstacles, he urged attendees to see them as calls to action.

Ambeba outlined the primary goals of the GDC Africa Forum 2025, which included:

- Developing innovative solutions to strengthen governance and accountability.
- Facilitating intergenerational dialogue to bridge the gap between policymakers and citizens.
- Advancing democracy through policy, advocacy, and action.

He expressed appreciation to The Youth Café, Afrobarometer, SOMWA, CAHED, CVA Rwanda, and the Global Democracy Coalition for their contributions to organizing the forum. Special recognition was given to Willice Onyango, Executive Director of The Youth Café, for his visionary leadership, and to Ellisenda Baxto, GDC’s Coordinator, for her trust in his role as the event coordinator.

Concluding his speech, Ambeba urged participants to actively engage, share ideas boldly, and leave the forum empowered to shape Africa’s democratic future. He called for collective efforts to ignite change, build democratic resilience, and create a governance landscape reflective of the continent’s aspirations. His address set the stage for impactful discussions and strategic initiatives aimed at fostering democratic progress across Africa.



KEYNOTE SPEECHES

*Willice Onyango - Executive Director,
The Youth Café*

Willice Onyango, the Executive Director of The Youth Café, delivered a keynote address emphasizing the forum's pivotal role in advancing human rights, climate action, and community resilience. He began by acknowledging the immense expectations for the forum, highlighting that participants were eager to learn best practices, network, and engage in meaningful discussions. He underscored that the program had been carefully designed to facilitate dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and solution-oriented discussions, with the goal of fostering long-term collaboration beyond the forum.

Willice stressed that realizing individual human rights is fundamental, and the discussions at the forum would center around ensuring that these rights are upheld, particularly in the face of emerging global challenges. He encouraged participants to actively contribute to shaping solutions and pathways forward that would drive impactful actions in their respective communities.

On behalf of The Youth Café, Willice extended a warm and sincere welcome to all attendees, expressing hope that the forum would serve as a catalyst for sustained engagement and collective action. He envisioned a future where human rights are strengthened, climate action is prioritized, and communities across Africa become more resilient in the face of socio-economic and environmental challenges.

As part of his address, Willice had the honor of introducing the keynote speakers, acknowledging their expertise and invaluable contributions to the forum's objectives. With an inspiring close, Willice reaffirmed The Youth Café's commitment to fostering impactful conversations and partnerships, ensuring that the forum marks the beginning of a transformative journey toward a more rights-driven, climate-conscious, and resilient Africa.



KEYNOTE SPEECHES

*Mary Yvonne Ododah - Board Member,
The Youth Café*

Mary Yvonne Ododah, a board member of The Youth Café, delivered a compelling keynote address, setting the stage for the forum's deliberations. She emphasized the crucial role of democracy, human rights, and environmental justice in shaping Africa's governance landscape and sustainable development.

Ododah highlighted the uneven trajectory of democracy across the continent, citing both progress and setbacks. She referenced data from the Mo Ibrahim Foundation and Afrobarometer, noting that while support for democracy remains strong at 66%, it has declined in some regions, with increasing tolerance for military rule in countries such as Guinea and Burkina Faso. The speech underscored the need to restore faith in democratic governance by addressing corruption, election integrity, and the shrinking civic space.

She pointed to Kenya's 2024 youth-led protests against the controversial Finance Bill as an example of civic engagement and resilience. However, she also cautioned against the growing restrictions on civic space and the authoritarian responses witnessed in various African nations, including Sudan, where governance failures have exacerbated displacement and humanitarian crises.

Addressing human rights, Ododah painted a stark picture of deteriorating conditions across Africa. She referenced Amnesty International's 2024 report, which documented violent crackdowns on protests, arbitrary detentions, and increased suppression of dissent. Notably, she highlighted gender-based violence as a pervasive issue, citing statistics on female genital mutilation (FGM) in Kenya and femicide in South Africa.

She also raised concerns about armed conflicts in regions like the Democratic Republic of Congo, where groups such as M23 have been implicated in grave human rights abuses. The speech called for urgent legal and policy interventions to protect marginalized populations and ensure justice for victims of human rights violations.

On environmental justice, Ododah emphasized that although Africa contributes less than 4% of global emissions, it faces severe climate-related challenges, including droughts, floods, and food insecurity. She highlighted the negative impact of extractive industries, illegal mining, and crude oil refining on local communities, particularly in regions where weak governance has enabled environmental degradation.

She commended the outcomes of the 2023 African Climate Summit in Nairobi, particularly the Nairobi Declaration, which reinforced Africa's role in driving green growth and climate finance. She also lauded Kenya's Climate Change Act for its emphasis on carbon markets and community benefits. However, she stressed that meaningful action is needed to ensure sustainable solutions that empower indigenous communities and mitigate environmental destruction.

Ododah's keynote concluded with a powerful call to action, urging young people to leverage their collective power to drive change. She emphasized the importance of investments in education, leadership development and digital literacy to empower the next generation of African leaders.

She reiterated the role of organizations like The Youth Café, which has engaged over 947,000 young people across the continent in shaping governance and policy discussions. She called upon stakeholders present at the forum to commit to fostering inclusive governance, protecting human rights and advancing environmental sustainability.



KEYNOTE SPEECHES

*David Rabuor JR - Founder &
Head of Strategic Management
– CAHED Kenya*

At the Global Democracy Coalition Africa Regional Forum, David, Director of Committee Action for Health and Development (CAHED), delivered a compelling keynote address on strengthening democratic resilience in Africa. Speaking on behalf of esteemed partners such as The Youth Café, Afrobarometer, Somali Media Women Association, and Citizen Voice and Actions, he highlighted governance as a pillar for safeguarding human rights and environmental justice.

David acknowledged Africa's progress in electoral participation and political freedoms but cautioned that many nations are at a crossroads, grappling with authoritarianism, shrinking civic space, and military interventions. He pointed to West Africa as a region witnessing democratic erosion due to unconstitutional term extensions and governance failures. Despite these setbacks, he noted that Africans overwhelmingly support democracy, though trust in electoral processes remains fragile.

A central theme of his address was the interconnection between human rights and environmental justice. He stressed that climate change is not just an environmental crisis but a human rights issue, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. Examples of desertification, forced evictions, and resource-related conflicts illustrate how environmental degradation deepens social inequalities. He asserted that any democracy failing to integrate climate resilience is incomplete, calling for stronger governance frameworks that prioritize sustainability and justice.

David outlined five key action areas to strengthen democracy and environmental justice:

1. **Inclusive Participation** – Governments must ensure that youth, women, and marginalized communities have a voice in policymaking.
2. **Protecting Civic Space** – Journalists, activists, and civil society organizations must be safeguarded against persecution.
3. **Climate Justice in Governance** – Legal frameworks should address climate-induced displacement and enforce corporate accountability.
4. **Technology for Transparency** – Digital tools should be leveraged to enhance civic engagement and combat misinformation.
5. **Regional and Global Solidarity** – African nations must work with international bodies and regional organizations like the African Union to uphold democratic values.

Concluding his address, David called for a shift from dialogue to action, urging that future forums include grassroots communities often excluded from democratic discourse. Addressing the youth, he emphasized their role in shaping the future of democracy and environmental justice, encouraging them to take bold action. He closed by thanking the Global Democracy Coalition and event partners, reaffirming that democracy is an ongoing struggle for justice, dignity, and accountability, and that its success depends on collective commitment and action today.



KEYNOTE SPEECHES

*Tracey Osogo, Center for Multi Party
Democracy*

Tracey, representing the Center for Multi-Party Democracy Kenya (CMD-Kenya), delivered an inspiring keynote speech at the Global Democracy Coalition Africa Regional Forum 2025. She began by welcoming attendees, emphasizing the significance of the venue, where she herself is both an alumna and a current student. She expressed hope that participants would feel at home in this space—one where stars are made—and that they would leave the forum as meaningful contributors to democratic progress.

She extended her congratulations to The Youth Café and other partners for successfully organizing the event, sharing how honored she felt when she reached out to Willice Onyango and was warmly invited to support the initiative. She commended the organizers for their dedication to fostering meaningful dialogue and expressed CMD-Kenya's pride in partnering with The Youth Café, particularly in their annual People's Dialogue Festival. She reaffirmed CMD-Kenya's commitment to supporting such platforms that promote inclusive and engaging discussions on democracy. Tracey emphasized CMD-Kenya's core belief that democracy begins with dialogue. She noted that the forum was an essential space where young people, senior citizens, policymakers, and civic actors could convene to reflect on democratic gains, assess present challenges, and shape the future of democracy. However, she also voiced concern about the growing intolerance for divergent political views.

She illustrated this concern with a recent example—the state visit of the King and Queen of the Netherlands to Kenya. She highlighted the online backlash, where over 22,000 petitions opposed the visit. Despite this, the King and Queen proceeded with their trip, engaging in dialogue with young people, including herself. During the off-camera discussion, she noted that some questioned the legitimacy of the youth representatives and their right to engage with the monarchy. This, she argued, underscored the necessity of fostering spaces where all voices—regardless of their stance—are respected and heard.

Tracey stressed that true democracy thrives in environments where different perspectives are allowed to coexist. She urged young people to embrace dialogue, even when views differ, and to create spaces where every individual can speak their truth without fear of dismissal or exclusion. Encouraging open, respectful, and constructive discourse, she called on participants to uphold the principles of safe spaces and democratic inclusivity.

In conclusion, she expressed her enthusiasm for the forum and encouraged attendees to engage actively, learn from one another, and make the most of the opportunity. She thanked Willice Onyango and The Youth Café team for organizing the event and wished everyone a fruitful and enjoyable experience. With a confident and energized closing, she welcomed everyone once again to the Global Democracy Coalition Africa Forum 2025, setting a tone of optimism and engagement for the discussions ahead.



KEYNOTE SPEECHES

Elisenda Balleste Buxo, Global Democracy Coalition, GDC coordinator

Elisenda, representing the Global Democracy Coalition (GDC), delivered a compelling keynote speech on the critical need for sustainable funding for democracy and human rights. She acknowledged the dedication of democracy defenders and commended the efforts of the event organizers, expressing hope that every participant would leave the forum with renewed determination to strengthen and advance democratic values.

She emphasized that democracy and human rights are not self-sustaining and should not be viewed as optional. They form the foundation of peaceful, resilient, and just societies. However, despite their fundamental importance, they remain chronically underfunded. Currently, less than 1.5% of official development assistance is allocated to democracy and human rights initiatives, even though these efforts have been proven to reduce conflict, promote economic inclusion, and foster long-term stability. She highlighted that 2025 marks a turning point, as democracy-related aid has suffered significant reductions. The consequences are severe, with organizations supporting independent media, women's political participation, free and fair elections, and grassroots civic movements being forced to scale down or shut down entirely.

Despite these challenges, she recognized the resilience of democracy advocates. Many organizations, particularly in Africa, have sustained youth engagement programs through volunteer efforts, community fundraising, and cross-border partnerships. However, she stressed that rebuilding alone cannot replace deliberate investment and long-term support for democracy initiatives.

She warned of the greater cost that comes with failing to fund democracy. When civic space shrinks and corruption rises, instability follows. The defunding of democracy does not just silence non-governmental organizations but weakens entire societies, emboldens autocrats, and leaves communities vulnerable.

Another critical issue she addressed was corruption, which threatens the effectiveness of democracy funding. In some African countries, up to one-third of the national budget is lost to corrupt practices. The misallocation of resources raises important questions about transparency and accountability, which citizens must continue to demand.

Elisenda emphasized that independent media, civic education programs, women's political platforms, and electoral monitoring are not optional components of democracy but essential pillars that must be safeguarded.

She called on governments, donors, and civil society to prioritize sustainable funding, warning that without it, the infrastructure of democracy itself is at risk. She concluded by urging all stakeholders to take democracy seriously and recognize it as a global public good that requires sustained commitment and investment.



KEYNOTE SPEECHES

*Michael Miriti- Deputy Director Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, Kenya
(Representing the Chief Guest)*

Michael Miriti, the Deputy Director for Multilateral Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, delivered a keynote on behalf of Dr. Korir Singoei, who was unable to attend due to official commitments at State House. He acknowledged key partners, including The Youth Café, the Global Democracy Coalition, and Faisal University, for convening the event.

Miriti emphasized the interconnection between democracy, human rights, and environmental justice, framing them as pillars of global governance and sustainable development. He argued that democracy goes beyond electoral processes to include inclusive governance, accountability, and the protection of fundamental freedoms. He underscored the rule of law as essential for protecting human rights, which, in turn, underpin environmental justice. Access to clean air, water, and a habitable environment, he asserted, must be recognized as basic human rights. Advancing these ideals, he said, requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving governments, the private sector, civil society, and local communities.

Speaking on Kenya's regional and international leadership, Miriti highlighted the country's role in peace mediation and security efforts across Africa. He pointed to Kenya's membership in the UN Human Rights Council (2024–2027) as an opportunity to strengthen national policies while championing global issues like clean energy transitions, environmental justice, and social protection. He acknowledged concerns about accountability in human rights commitments, noting that Kenya's participation in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) ensures regular assessment of its progress by fellow UN member states.

On environmental justice, Miriti stressed that while Africa suffers the worst climate change impacts, it contributes less than 4% of global emissions. He highlighted the undervaluation of Africa's carbon sinks, which leads to an unfair distribution of climate financing. Kenya, he said, is committed to leading Africa's green transition, as reflected in its Foreign Policy (2024) and Climate Change Act. However, he criticized global climate governance frameworks, arguing that commitments under the Paris Agreement remain insufficient to address the urgency of the crisis, particularly for vulnerable nations like Kenya.

Miriti referenced a case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), led by Vanuatu, which seeks a legal ruling on state responsibility in addressing climate change. He suggested that such legal interventions could set new precedents for climate accountability, urging participants to consider whether the global community will uphold its commitments or fail vulnerable nations.

Concluding his speech, Miriti called for collective action in strengthening democracy, advancing human rights, and promoting environmental justice. He urged policy advocacy, sustained engagement, and international cooperation to address these pressing global challenges.



RESEARCH INSIGHTS: TRENDS IN DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

Prof. Paul Kamau, University of Nairobi

Prof. Kamau expressed gratitude for the opportunity to address such a distinguished gathering on the state of democracy in Africa. He highlighted his work at the Institute for Government Studies and his engagement with the Afrobarometer Project, an initiative that provides critical insights into public perceptions of democracy across the continent.

He noted that democracy is facing significant global challenges, with Africa being no exception. Citing the 2024 Democracy Index, he pointed out that democratic indicators had declined, dropping from 0.56 in 2006 to 0.52 in 2024. This, he argued, reflects growing concerns about governance, electoral integrity, and civic freedoms. Despite these challenges, he emphasized that Africans remain deeply committed to democracy.

According to Afrobarometer surveys, conducted in 39 African countries since 1999:

- 66% of Africans prefer democracy over any other form of government.
- 80% oppose one-man rule, demonstrating strong resistance to authoritarian leadership.
- There is widespread support for political pluralism.

However, he acknowledged growing frustration with how democracy is practiced, particularly regarding governance and service delivery.

Prof. Kamau raised concerns over the declining trust in key democratic institutions, using Kenya as a case study:

- Public confidence in the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) has dropped to 36%, raising concerns about electoral credibility.
- Trust in the police remains low, with many citizens viewing law enforcement as repressive rather than protective.
- Many Africans doubt the fairness of elections, believing electoral outcomes are often manipulated.
- Parliamentary oversight has weakened, as elected leaders fail to hold governments accountable.

Survey data indicated a steady decline in satisfaction with democracy:

- In 2010, 50% of Africans expressed satisfaction with democracy, but by 2024, this figure had dropped to 39%.
- Poor governance, lack of transparency, and unfulfilled political promises were key reasons for this decline.

When asked about military intervention in governance,

- 53% of Africans opposed military involvement, showing a preference for civilian rule.
- However, in countries like Mali and Tunisia, some citizens view military takeovers as necessary in cases of government corruption or dysfunction.

Focusing on Kenya, he noted that calls for democratic reforms are growing, especially among the youth. Survey data shows that:

- 80% of Kenyans support presidential term limits, showing a strong demand for leadership accountability.
- Multi-party democracy remains widely accepted, reinforcing Kenya's commitment to political diversity.
- 57% of Kenyans oppose military interference in politics, affirming support for civilian governance.
- Despite these positive indicators, public dissatisfaction with democracy is increasing, driven by weak governance, controversial elections, and lack of accountability among elected officials.

Prof. Kamau outlined four critical areas requiring urgent attention:

1. **Enhancing Public Sector Accountability** – Democratic institutions must be more transparent and responsive to citizens' needs, and political leaders must show a genuine commitment to democratic principles.
2. **Addressing Corruption and Impunity** – Strict enforcement of laws is necessary to hold public officials accountable for misconduct.
3. **Improving Electoral Integrity** – Elections must be credible, transparent, and inclusive, with electoral bodies free from political influence.
4. **Expanding Civic Space** – Citizens, particularly youth, should be more involved in governance and decision-making processes.

Despite these challenges, Africans still believe in democracy. The decline in public satisfaction is not a rejection of democracy, but rather a demand for better governance. He urged all stakeholders to restore public trust in institutions, strengthen electoral processes, and uphold democratic values. By doing so, Africa can build a future where democracy truly serves its people.

Finally, he encouraged attendees to engage with Afrobarometer's research, noting that data from 1999 to 2024 is freely accessible online for deeper insights into Africa's democratic landscape.

PANEL DISCUSSION 1

DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



Moderator:

DANIEL IBERI (AFROBAROMETER)

Panelists:

- **ZAINA KOMBO (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL KENYA)**
- **SANTO ASTORINO (MUNDUS GROUP)**
- **COMMR. DR. DENNIS WAMALWA (KNCHR)**

The panel discussion on democracy, human rights, and environmental justice provided a platform for critical reflections on the state of democracy in Africa, its intersection with human rights, and the role of grassroots organizations in bridging the gap between policy and action. With insights from experts and practitioners, the discussion aimed to explore solutions to the democratic stagnation and environmental challenges facing the continent



Zaina Kombo

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL KENYA

Responding to the question on how democratic government frameworks can effectively address environmental crises while ensuring human rights protections, she emphasized the need for strong institutional accountability as the foundation of democracy. She highlighted that impunity remains a major obstacle to civil rights and governance, stressing that effective democratic institutions must uphold accountability to safeguard both human rights and environmental justice. She pointed out that Kenya's 2010 Constitution provides a framework that empowers citizens, particularly youth, to demand transparency and accountability from institutions responsible for governance and environmental protection. The shift from subjecthood to active citizenship, as outlined in Article 1, ensures that sovereign power rests with the people, making their participation in decision-making processes essential.

Zaina further underscored that human rights are inherent and not granted by governments, emphasizing that citizens must assert and protect these rights as enshrined in Chapter 4 of the Kenyan Constitution and Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). On environmental justice, she argued that protecting the environment is fundamentally about securing human survival and sustainable development. Citizens must actively resist exclusion, suppression of civic spaces, and any attempts to weaken democratic freedoms. She asserted that democracy cannot be defunded—collective civic action remains the most powerful tool against impunity and injustice. Recent movements have demonstrated how public mobilization can effectively reclaim governance and drive reforms. Zaina concluded by reinforcing the importance of civic empowerment, strategic mobilization, and institutional accountability in ensuring that environmental policies translate into tangible and lasting change.



Santo Astorino

MUNDUS GROUP

Emphasized the critical role that grassroots organizations play in bridging the gap between policy and action, particularly in addressing environmental challenges. He highlighted three key contributions of these organizations. First, he noted that grassroots organizations have direct connections with communities, allowing them to identify environmental and social issues at the local level. This engagement ensures active community participation in decision-making and helps align policies with the real needs of the people.

Second, he pointed out that these organizations can implement contextualized solutions by adapting global strategies to local realities. Through approaches such as sustainable technology, community-based resource management, and participatory governance, grassroots organizations facilitate decentralized models of policy implementation. Finally, Santo stressed that grassroots organizations play a crucial role in political advocacy and social mobilization. By translating community demands into effective political pressure, they help ensure citizen oversight of environmental regulations and build public confidence in policy enforcement.

However, he also highlighted several challenges that hinder effective policy implementation. He observed that policymaking often follows a top-down approach, excluding communities from decision-making. Additionally, a lack of resources and shared values makes it difficult to implement initiatives that promote social and environmental justice. Lastly, he underscored the importance of education and skill development, particularly for young people, as a fundamental factor in achieving long-term environmental and social justice outcomes.



Dr Dennis Wamalwa

KENYA NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (KNHRC)

Responding to the question on the biggest human rights challenges linked to environmental justice and how institutions can address them, Dr. Wamalwa provided insights from a policy-making perspective. He highlighted that while human rights are universally recognized and guaranteed by law—through treaties, customary international law, and national constitutions—implementation remains a challenge. He pointed out that the Kenyan Constitution guarantees the right to a clean and healthy environment, yet several barriers hinder environmental justice.

Among the key challenges he identified were:

1. Threats to environmental defenders – Arbitrary detention, harassment, and even killings of environmental human rights defenders.
2. Limited access to environmental information – Many communities lack full disclosure on resource exploitation projects, undermining meaningful public participation.
3. Inadequate public participation – Despite being a constitutional principle, many decision-making processes fail to engage affected communities effectively.
4. Lack of a benefit-sharing framework – Communities often suffer the consequences of resource extraction without receiving any benefits.
5. Limited access to justice – Historical and ongoing environmental injustices remain unresolved, even as new cases continue to emerge.

Dr. Wamalwa emphasized that institutions like the Kenya National Human Rights Commission (KNHRC) play a critical role in addressing these challenges.

He outlined several opportunities and solutions, including:

1. Strengthening complaint and investigation systems to report and address environmental violations.
2. Seeking redress for victims through public inquiries and legal actions, such as the Ogiek case at the African Court.
3. Advocating for policy and legislative reforms, such as Kenya's National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights.
4. Enhancing collaboration between stakeholders, including young people, human rights actors, and policymakers, to drive change



Mr. Martin Pepella

In response to a follow-up question on how relevant bodies address arbitrary detention, Mr. Martin Pepella, speaking on behalf of the Commission, explained that while the rule of law should guide all actions, enforcement challenges persist. He acknowledged that some arresting officers act arbitrarily and violate due process.

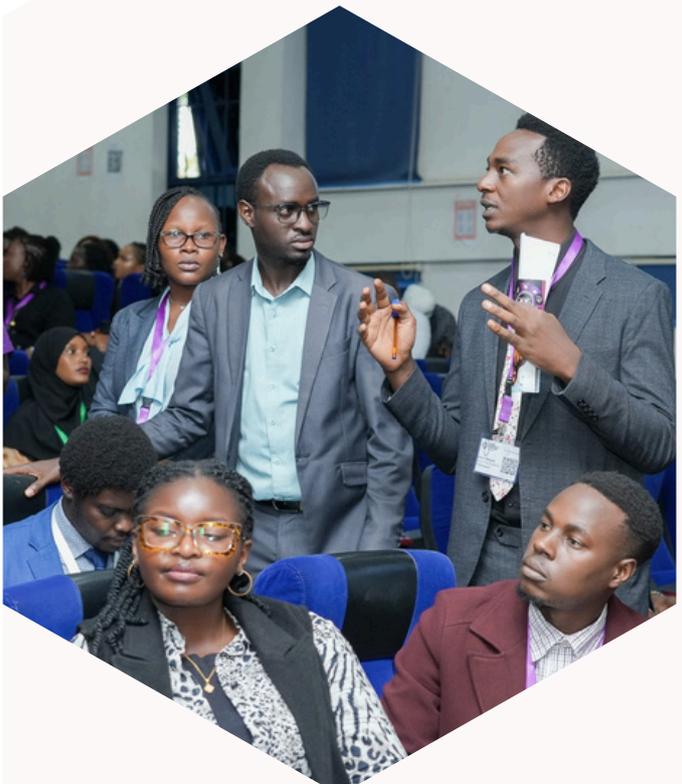
However, the Commission relies on three key mechanisms to address such violations:

1. Judiciary intervention – The Commission moves to court under public interest litigation to seek justice for victims.
2. Parliamentary engagement – Petitions are submitted to parliamentary committees responsible for oversight.
3. Media exposure – Journalistic coverage helps bring attention to injustices and holds perpetrators accountable.

Martin concluded by emphasizing the importance of transparency, legal action, and public awareness in tackling human rights violations related to environmental justice.

During the Q&A session, several critical questions were raised regarding democracy, justice, and governance in Kenya. The panel explored the challenges faced by the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) in delivering justice to victims of arbitrary arrests, strategies to strengthen Kenya's democratic institutions to better serve marginalized communities in environmental justice, and the country's progress in fulfilling human rights treaties and agreements. Additionally, the discussion addressed whether democracy can guarantee and deliver peace, and whether the faceless and leaderless narrative adopted by Gen Z activists is necessary. Responses from panelists emphasized that KNCHR cannot arrest but only report violations, highlighting the importance of following financial accountability through a 360-degree approach. Panelists also stressed the need for access to information to gather evidence, solidarity efforts, youth empowerment, and the necessity of engaging with leaders to drive meaningful change.

BREAKOUT SESSION: **WORLD CAFE** INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION ON THE THEMATIC AREAS



GROUP ONE

Strengthening Democratic Institutions

Q1. MAIN CHALLENGES FACING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS TODAY

- Limited/Inaccessible Funding – Lack of financial resources hinders the operations of democratic institutions.
 - Corruption – Rampant misuse of public funds weakens governance.
 - Unaccountability – Leaders and institutions fail to answer to the public.
 - Interference from the Executive – Overreach disrupts the independence of democratic bodies.
 - Power Imbalance Between Stakeholders – Unequal distribution of influence affects decision-making.
 - Shrinking Civic Space – Restrictive policies limit civil society operations.
 - Lack of Cohesion Between Stakeholders – Fragmentation reduces efficiency in governance.
 - Inequalities – Economic, political, social, and gender disparities hinder fair representation.
 - Impractical Policies – Laws and frameworks do not address real societal needs.
 - Interference from Western Countries – External influence shapes domestic governance.
 - Low Self-Esteem – Citizens feel powerless to drive change.
 - Lack of Proper Civic Education – Poor awareness leads to disengagement.
 - Laxity from Duty Bearers – Officials neglect responsibilities, affecting service delivery

Q2. Innovative Strategies to Promote Democracy

- Criminalizing Corruption and Unethical Governance – Making violations punishable by law.
- Ethics Standards Enforced by an Independent Board – Holding public officials accountable.
- Strengthening the Justice System – Ensuring judicial independence and authority.
- Structured Civic Engagements for Public Participation – Formalizing citizen involvement in governance.
- Leveraging Technology for Accountability & Transparency – Digital tools to track government activities.
- Strengthening Stakeholder Engagement at Key Governance Moments – Ensuring public participation during budget reviews and financial audits.

Q3. How Can Different Stakeholders Collaborate to Strengthen the System?

- Stakeholder Roundtables – Regular multi-stakeholder discussions to enhance accountability.
- Dialogue Sessions – Creating safe spaces for open conversations on governance challenges.
- Strengthening/Establishing Consortia – Coalition-building to promote democracy and accountability.
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Focus – Businesses taking an active role in governance reforms.
- Reviewing Existing Policies & Acts – Promoting decentralization of power for more balanced governance

Q4. How Can We Ensure Implementation and Accountability in Government and Power Structures?

Successful Case Studies:

- Ivory Coast's High Authority for Good Governance – Operational for over three years, ensuring oversight.
- Digital Apps for Accountability:
 - o Uamuzi – Tracks government performance.
 - o A40 – Monitors public expenditure.
 - o Uajibikaji – Enhances public accountability.
- Tunu Project (by TISA & TI) in Collaboration with EACC – Social audit of the NG-CDF in Kiambu County.
- Gen Z Protests & Social Media Advocacy – Youth-driven activism leveraging digital platforms to demand reforms.

GROUP 2:

Environmental Justice & Climate Resilience

Q1. Pressing Environmental Justice Issues Across Africa The discussion identified key environmental justice challenges affecting various regions in Africa:

- Air Pollution – Primarily caused by industries owned by the wealthy, yet disproportionately affecting the poor. The health and socio-economic impacts of air pollution are intergenerational, worsening inequality.
- Desertification & Deforestation – Rapid urbanization has led to the destruction of arable land to pave the way for infrastructure development. This has significantly compromised ecosystems and food security.
- Biodiversity Loss & Land Degradation – The destruction of natural habitats has led to severe environmental degradation, threatening both wildlife and human livelihoods.
- Lack of Awareness – Many communities are unaware of the long-term consequences of environmental degradation and are not sufficiently engaged in climate action initiatives.

Q2. Role of Grassroots Organizations in Climate Resilience Advocacy Marginalized communities and grassroots organizations play a crucial role in offering solutions and advocating for climate resilience:

- Indigenous Knowledge & Sustainable Practices – Traditional environmental management practices have historically been more sustainable than many modern alternatives. Indigenous communities should be supported in preserving and applying their knowledge.
- Community-Led Policy Actions – Initiatives such as FLOCCA (Financing Locally-Led Climate Action) empower communities to prioritize and address the climate issues that affect them most.
- Training & Capacity Building – Strengthening leadership and organizational structures within grassroots movements ensures that communities can take charge of climate action and advocacy effectively.

Q3. Successful Grassroots Movements & Community-Led Climate Initiatives Several grassroots movements and community-driven initiatives have successfully tackled climate challenges:

- Mathare Environmental Champions – Formed after evictions from riverbanks, this group has led efforts to plant trees along the river, resulting in increased biodiversity.
- Mathare Social Justice Centre, Mathare Green Movement, and Mathare Social Community Association – These organizations promote urban farming, tree planting on riparian land, and environmental education for the local community.
- The Green Belt Movement – Founded by the late Wangari Maathai, this initiative has planted over 50 million trees and continues to champion reforestation and environmental conservation in Kenya.
- Mukuru Community Initiatives – Grassroots movements in Mukuru informal settlements are leading afforestation efforts and public environmental awareness campaigns.

Q4. Role of Youth and Civil Society in Environmental Justice & Climate Resilience The youth and civil society have a critical role in advocating for environmental justice and climate resilience:

- Carbon Credits Redistribution – Advocates emphasized the need for carbon credit revenues to directly benefit affected communities.
- Community-Led Advocacy in Local Languages – Ensuring climate messages are accessible and culturally relevant empowers communities to develop and implement their own solutions.
- Civil Society's Role in Holding Governments Accountable – Although policies exist, there is often no political goodwill to implement them. Civil society must push for an effective operational framework.
- Intergenerational Collaboration – Youth movements should engage with older generations to understand historical environmental practices and integrate them into modern solutions. There is a need to resist divide-and-conquer tactics that fragment climate action efforts.

GROUP 3

Youth & Civil Society in Democratic Reforms

Q1: Barriers Preventing Youth from Actively Engaging in Democratic Processes The discussion highlighted several key barriers that hinder youth participation in democratic processes:

- Political Exclusion through Negotiations – Young people are often the first to be negotiated out of political party arrangements, particularly in dominant parties, limiting their chances of running for office.
- Cultural and Social Barriers – Some communities believe that young, unmarried individuals should not seek leadership positions. Additionally, financial constraints make it difficult for young people to meet the high costs associated with political campaigns.
- Systemic Challenges in Voter Registration – Many youths have applied for national identity cards but have not received them, preventing them from registering as voters. This was noted as both a systemic and potentially deliberate issue.
- Election Injustice and Lack of Trust – The perception that elections are predetermined discourages youth from voting or running for office. Additionally, repeated government failures to fulfill promises have led to voter apathy.
- Lack of Political Awareness and Participation – Many young people do not attend public participation forums where crucial decisions affecting them are made. When they fail to engage, allocated funds meant for youth programs are misused.
- Intimidation and Political Violence – Youths who try to engage in politics face threats, abductions, and violence, discouraging them from participating actively.
- Lack of Political Education and Skills – Many young people do not know how to draft policies, write white papers, or navigate governance structures, making it difficult for them to influence political processes effectively.

Q2: How Can CSOs and Youth Movements Be More Effective in Influencing Governance? Participants identified several ways in which civil society organizations (CSOs) and youth movements can enhance their impact on governance:

- Knowledge and Skills Development – Youth need to be equipped with knowledge on how governance structures function and how to engage effectively within these systems.
- Bold Engagement – Young people must take a proactive approach in demanding accountability from leaders.
- Mass Mobilization – Mobilizing peers and communities to actively demand transparency and inclusivity in governance.
- Strategic Media and Influencer Engagement – Leveraging media platforms and working with key influencers to amplify youth voices in governance discussions.

Q 3: Strategies to Sustain Youth Movements Beyond Protests and Elections To ensure youth movements remain impactful beyond elections and protests, participants recommended:

- Grassroots Mobilization – CSOs should organize and support grassroots movements that actively engage communities in governance matters.
- Structured Youth Representation – A properly constituted National Youth Council to provide a formalized structure for youth advocacy.
- Combating Misinformation – Running information campaigns to counter misinformation that undermines youth participation.
- Youth Participation in Electoral Processes – Training and deploying youth agents to monitor elections, report irregularities, and participate in vote tallying

PANEL DISCUSSION 2 ANTI-CORRUPTION AND GOVERNANCE



Moderator:

MRS MARYAN SEYLAC, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SOMWA

Panelists:

- KHAKABA OMUKUNDA, TEAM LEADER AHADI GOVERNANCE AND RESEARCH CONSULTANT (AGREC)
- ELVIS SITATI, FOUNDER/CEO UAMUZI FOUNDATION STEFANO COBELLO PHD, SOCIOLOGY OF INCLUSION COORDINATOR OF THE EUROPEAN POLE OF KNOWLEDGE NATIONAL NETWORK OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS
- NATASHA KIMANI, REGIONAL DIRECTOR FUTURELECT, EAST AFRICA.
- LEONARD WANYAMA, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SOCIETY OF KENYA (IRSK)
- JOHN MUNDIA NYOIKE, LEGAL OFFICER, THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION

The panel discussion on Anti-Corruption and Governance provided a platform for critical reflections on the impact of corruption on democratic institutions, economic development, and public trust. Experts and practitioners examined the challenges of enforcing accountability, the role of institutions in strengthening governance, and the importance of civic engagement in combating corruption. The discussion aimed to explore practical solutions for promoting transparency, strengthening the rule of law, and ensuring that governance structures serve the interests of all citizens.



Natasha Kimani

EAST AFRICA DIRECTOR AT FUTURELECT

Delivered a compelling analysis of Kenya's integrity and accountability framework. She underscored that while the Constitution was designed to combat corruption, persistent legal loopholes undermine its enforcement, allowing public officials to evade accountability.

Key insights from her discussion:

- Weaknesses in the Integrity Chapter – The lack of stringent enforcement mechanisms hinders the effective implementation of anti-corruption measures.
- Conflict of Interest Loopholes – Ambiguities in the legal framework create opportunities for public officials to manipulate the system for personal gain.
- Urgent Need for Stronger Integrity Laws – Strengthening Kenya's legislative and institutional frameworks is critical to closing gaps that facilitate corruption.
- Empowering Youth Through Political Education – Raising awareness among young people about governance and accountability is essential in fostering a culture of integrity and responsible leadership.

Kimani emphasized that without decisive legal reforms and stronger enforcement mechanisms, corruption will continue to thrive, undermining democratic governance and economic development. She called for collective action from policymakers, civil society, and citizens to strengthen transparency and accountability in public office.



Dr. Stefano Cobello

EUROPEAN POLE OF KNOWLEDGE

Emphasized that corruption is not just a Kenyan issue but a regional challenge that threatens democracy, governance, and sustainable development across the East African Community (EAC).

He highlighted how corruption erodes democratic institutions, weakens public trust in governance, and disrupts socio-economic progress. From a sociological perspective, he examined how societal perceptions of wealth and status fuel corrupt practices, reinforcing inequality and undermining ethical leadership. Drawing from the principles of non-violence and environmental stewardship as advocated by Vandana Shiva and Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Cobello underscored the urgent need for systemic reforms, value-driven leadership, and a shift in societal norms to combat corruption effectively and foster accountable governance.



Leonard Wanyama

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SOCIETY OF KENYA AND REGIONAL COORDINATOR OF THE EAST AFRICAN TAX AND GOVERNANCE NETWORK

Emphasized the need to shift from merely understanding constitutional rights to actively embracing responsibilities in governance. Reflecting on Kenya's 20-year struggle for constitutional legitimacy culminating in the 2010 Constitution, he underscored the urgency of addressing policy loopholes that undermine governance and accountability.

He highlighted corruption in various forms—ranging from outright theft and nepotism to systemic weaknesses in tax governance—that continue to erode democratic institutions and public trust. Wanyama stressed that resource misappropriation not only diverts critical funds from essential sectors like education and development but also threatens democratic stability. He called for robust legal reforms, public awareness, and a collective commitment to closing governance gaps, ensuring that legitimacy is upheld in policy-making and implementation.



Elvis Sitati

FOUNDER AND CEO OF UAMUZI

Emphasized the critical role of civic engagement in strengthening democracy and combating corruption. Through Uamuzi, a social networking platform designed as an alternative to mainstream social media, he aims to provide young people in Kenya with a safe and empowering space to actively participate in governance at all levels. Sitati underscored the importance of meaningful engagement between citizens and both elected and aspiring leaders, ensuring accountability through open dialogue.

He highlighted how access to verified and credible information enables communities to make informed decisions while freely expressing their concerns without fear. He pointed to the growing influence of digital activism and civic tech in exposing corruption, amplifying youth voices, and demanding transparency from those in power. Sitati defined bribery as the misuse of public funds for personal gain and identified electoral fraud as a persistent challenge across African nations, undermining democratic processes. Advocating for the use of technology as a powerful tool to combat corruption, he emphasized how digital platforms like Uamuzi facilitate civic participation, empower communities, and foster a culture of accountability essential for good governance



Kennedy Khakaba Omukunda

AGREC TEAM LEADER

Underscored the intrinsic link between democracy, human rights, and environmental justice, emphasizing that these pillars form the foundation of a just and sustainable society. While democratic institutions provide governance frameworks that enable public participation, human rights protect fundamental freedoms, and environmental justice ensures equitable resource distribution, he noted that these principles are frequently undermined in many African nations, including Kenya.

Weak governance, corruption, and economic interests that prioritize profit over social and environmental well-being have led to rampant resource exploitation, land dispossession, and environmental degradation. Political interference, weak enforcement mechanisms, and limited access to justice further exacerbate these challenges, leaving affected communities vulnerable. Khakaba called for sustained collective action involving government institutions, civil society organizations, and international partners to address these issues effectively. He particularly highlighted budget corruption as a growing concern, questioning the accountability mechanisms in place to investigate corruption and ensure justice. Additionally, he warned against the dangerous trend of glorifying corrupt leaders who misuse public funds, stressing the need for stronger institutional frameworks to protect democracy, uphold human rights, and foster transparent governance.



John Mundia Nyoike

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION

Emphasized the transformative role of technology in promoting transparency and accountability in governance. He highlighted how digital tools can be leveraged to enhance access to information, streamline oversight mechanisms, and expose corruption, ultimately strengthening democratic institutions. Mundia particularly underscored the significance of beneficial ownership transparency, which ensures that the true owners of businesses and assets are publicly disclosed, preventing illicit financial activities such as money laundering and tax evasion.

By advocating for technology-driven governance, he called for increased digital solutions that empower citizens with real-time, credible information, enabling them to hold leaders accountable and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. He stressed that widespread access to information is not just a necessity but a fundamental right that can curb corruption and foster a more just and equitable society



IGNITE SPEECH CORRUPTION VS. DEMOCRACY: THE BATTLE FOR INTEGRITY IN LEADERSHIP

Mr. Mwongela Mbiti, Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC)

The Head of Corporate Affairs and Communications. Mr. Mbiti conveyed the Commission's appreciation to the organizers for the invitation and acknowledged the importance of the discussions taking place, including some of the criticism directed at the EACC. He reaffirmed that the EACC, as a constitutional body, was mandated to lead the fight against corruption and remained committed to its role.

He emphasized that the responsibility of combating corruption did not rest solely with the EACC but required a collective effort from all stakeholders, including the public. He noted that corruption continued to undermine democracy, erode public trust, and hinder progress. According to him, democratic governance relied on fairness, transparency, accountability, and service to the people. However, corruption infiltrated institutions, weakened checks and balances, and allowed manipulation of public processes.

Mr. Mbiti also highlighted the high cost of elections in Kenya, linking campaign financing to post-election corruption. He recalled an article written by Mr. Karuge in 2021, which had pointed out that politicians who spent large sums during campaigns often sought to recover these expenses through unethical means once elected. He noted that while legislation on campaign financing existed, attempts to regulate campaign expenditures had faced resistance, particularly from those benefiting from the current system. Addressing concerns about the EACC's effectiveness, he reiterated that the Commission was legally empowered to combat corruption and had made notable progress, including prosecuting high-profile cases. However, he acknowledged that resource constraints posed a significant challenge, especially with corruption cases now extending across county governments. He urged the public to actively support the EACC by providing information and cooperating in efforts to curb corruption.

During the Q&A session, participants raised various issues, including the role of education in fighting corruption, the need for campaign finance reforms, and the importance of civic engagement. A representative from the National Youth Council (NYC) argued that Kenya's education system was more focused on producing consumers rather than innovative thinkers, which hindered local solutions to national problems. A student from Rongo University questioned the high cost of elections and asked whether measures could be introduced to cap campaign spending and reduce the financial burden on elected officials. Another panelist underscored the role of institutions such as the Judiciary in ensuring accountability. It was observed that Kenya had made progress in establishing specialized courts for corruption and financial crimes, which was a step ahead of many other African nations. However, concerns remained about the enforcement of court decisions and the continued presence of individuals accused of corruption in public office.

A representative from FutureElect, an organization that trains young people for political leadership, encouraged youth to engage in governance beyond protests. She urged them to attend public forums where elected officials were present, ask tough questions about the use of public funds, and hold leaders accountable. She also called on young people interested in leadership to consider running for office in future elections. The discussion concluded with a reflection on the need for stronger political will in the fight against corruption. It was noted that while institutions such as the EACC had the mandate to investigate corruption, political interference and resource constraints often hindered their effectiveness. Participants agreed that civic education, legal reforms, and grassroots activism were essential in strengthening democracy and ensuring greater accountability in governance.

GLOBAL PANEL

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS



Moderator:

**DIANE TUYISHIME, CO-CHAIR,
CITIZEN VOICES ACTION (CVA) RWANDA**

Panelists:

- ZAHA INDIMULI, FOUNDER, AMALI COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION ANGEL MBUTHIA, YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE, DUTCH MFA
- EMMANUEL UGBEDE-OJO SANI, PROMAD FOUNDATION NIGERIA
- SANTIAGO BARRAIL, EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP FOR DEMOCRACY (EPD)
- RANGE MWITA, HEAD OF PROGRAMS, CENTRE FOR MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY KENYA
- BRIAN KITHINJI, POLICY ACTION INITIATIVE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EUROPEAN UNION YOUTH SOUNDING BOARD KENYA

The panel discussion on Overcoming Barriers to Youth Participation in Politics provided a platform to examine the structural, social, and economic challenges that hinder young people from engaging in political processes. Experts and youth advocates explored issues such as limited access to political spaces, economic constraints, and systemic exclusion. The discussion aimed to identify solutions for enhancing youth representation, fostering political inclusivity, and equipping young people with the resources and opportunities needed to shape governance and policy decisions.



Angel Mbuthia

YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE DUTCH MFA

Angel Mbuthia, Chair of the Youth League of the Jubilee Party and a seasoned youth activist, highlighted key barriers preventing young people, especially young women, from fully engaging in politics in Africa.

Key Barriers

1. Systemic Barriers

- Exclusion from electoral commissions and decision-making bodies despite being a significant voting demographic.
- Restrictive experience requirements (e.g., 10–15 years for leadership roles) that disqualify young candidates.
- Legal frameworks that favor older generations, limiting youth inclusion in governance.

2. Economic Barriers

- High financial costs of running for office, including nomination fees and campaign expenses.
- Limited access to economic opportunities, forcing young people to prioritize survival over political participation.

3. Social and Cultural Barriers

- Gender-based discrimination, early marriages, and teenage pregnancies disproportionately affecting young women.
- Political violence and intimidation, with youth activists facing repression or even fatalities.
- Traditional political parties controlled by older politicians, limiting opportunities for youth leadership.

Proposed Solutions

- **Legal Reforms:** Challenging restrictive laws through petitions and court interventions.
- **Youth Mobilization:** Strengthening grassroots and digital activism, inspired by movements like Gen Z protests in Kenya.
- **Regional Collaboration:** Learning from countries like Botswana, where young leaders hold ministerial positions.
- **Political Party Reforms:** Removing restrictive requirements to encourage youth-led parties.
- **Judicial & Legislative Advocacy:** Pushing for amendments in electoral laws to enhance youth representation.

Angel emphasized that overcoming these challenges requires sustained advocacy, legal action, and collective mobilization to secure a more inclusive political space for young people in Africa.



Zaha Indimuli

FOUNDER, AMALI COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Zaha, a national ambassador of the AFM Society Kenya movement, researcher, and social scientist, emphasized the critical role young people play in shaping Kenya's political and social landscape. She highlighted the growing influence of digital activism, particularly through the Gen Z movement, in mobilizing and empowering youth.

Key Insights

1. The Power of Social Media in Political Mobilization
 - Platforms like TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram have become crucial tools for youth activism and democratic participation.
 - Young people have effectively used these platforms to educate themselves, mobilize protests, and hold leaders accountable, as seen in their opposition to the Finance Bill.
2. Resistance to Digital Activism
 - Governments often demonize social media activism to suppress youth-led organizing.
 - Digital movements are "leaderless, formless, and motionless," making them difficult to infiltrate or control.
3. Disrupting Traditional Power Structures
 - Young people are rejecting outdated political tactics by refusing to engage in predictable systems of control.
 - The Gen Z movement strategically weakens misinformation campaigns and forces institutions to recognize new forms of political engagement.

Strategies for Inclusive Youth Engagement

1. Institutional Reforms – Political and civil society organizations should recognize digital activism as a legitimate form of civic engagement.
2. Protecting Digital Spaces – Governments must ensure online freedom by refraining from censorship and restrictions on social media.
3. Youth-Centered Political Frameworks – Young people should be actively involved in decision-making beyond traditional party structures.
4. Financial and Structural Support – Political organizations should provide funding and strategic support to sustain youth-led movements.

Zaha stressed that youth engagement in politics is evolving beyond conventional structures into decentralized, digital spaces where young people can exercise their democratic rights. She called on political institutions to adapt to these new dynamics and work towards fostering a more inclusive and youth-centered political landscape.



Mr Emmanuel Ugbede-Ojo Sani

PROGRAMMES OFFICER, PROMAD FOUNDATION NIGERIA

Exploring the challenges and solutions related to youth participation in politics, with a focus on the role of education, technology, and intergenerational collaboration in overcoming barriers, emphasized that youth engagement in politics should not be limited to those with access to digital spaces and formal education. He pointed out the existing disparity between urban, elite youth and those in grassroots communities who lack access to essential information and resources. ProMad Foundation has been actively working on social accountability projects to ensure that young people, particularly those in underserved regions, have the necessary tools to hold leaders accountable for public service delivery.

Education was highlighted as a fundamental pillar in enabling young people to participate meaningfully in governance. Emmanuel reiterated that political literacy is essential in equipping youth with the knowledge to track government policies, budget allocations, and public service implementation. He referenced Nelson Mandela's assertion that education is the most powerful tool for transformation, stressing that informed youth are more capable of challenging governance failures and advocating for systemic change.

Technology was identified as a powerful enabler of youth participation in governance. Emmanuel underscored the importance of both online and offline digital platforms in ensuring widespread political engagement. While social media has been instrumental in mobilizing youth, he noted that alternative offline methods must be developed to reach those in rural areas who are digitally excluded. Leveraging technology effectively can facilitate direct participation, transparency, and accountability in governance. Addressing the common stereotype that young people lack political experience, Emmanuel advocated for stronger intergenerational collaboration. He highlighted Nigeria's Legislative Mentorship Initiative, which provides young people with direct exposure to governance through fellowship and training programs. Such initiatives, he argued, can bridge the experience gap, ensuring that youth participation in politics is both informed and impactful.

He called for increased efforts to institutionalize mentorship programs within political institutions and civil society organizations. Emmanuel reinforced the urgency of redefining democracy to reflect Africa's unique socio-political context. By prioritizing education, leveraging technology, and fostering intergenerational collaboration, youth can dismantle systemic barriers and assert their role in governance. He urged policymakers, civil society, and young leaders to work collectively in creating sustainable, inclusive platforms for youth political participation.



Santiago Barrail

EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP FOR DEMOCRACY (EPD)

In response to a question on successful strategies and case studies that have effectively empowered youth participation in politics, Barrail emphasized the need to strengthen the public youth sector. While civil society-led youth engagement is well-developed, structured youth representation in governance requires more attention. He highlighted the importance of local-level political participation, where young people can engage in decision-making processes that directly impact their communities without the barriers of partisanship and polarization.

Successful Case Studies of Youth Engagement in Governance

1. Youth Municipal Councils (YMCs) as a Model
 - The Philippines: For over 40 years, elected youth representatives have had legal mandates and budgets to implement youth-led programs.
 - Greece & Colombia: These countries have adopted similar municipal youth council models to enhance structured youth participation.
 - Guatemala: Recently passed legislation establishing youth municipal councils, reinforcing the model's effectiveness.
2. Liberia's Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) Model
 - Legal Recognition: Established over 50 years ago through national legislation, ensuring official youth representation at the national level.
 - Government & International Engagement: Requires agencies and global partners to consult with FLY before implementing youth-related initiatives.
 - Influence on Policy: Actively engaged in shaping national youth policies, including leading the review and validation of Liberia's national youth strategy.

Key Recommendations for Enhancing Youth Political Engagement

1. Institutionalize Local Youth Representation – Governments should establish youth municipal councils with clear mandates, structured engagement, and dedicated funding for youth-led initiatives.
2. Develop Multi-Level Youth Governance Frameworks – Youth representation should be structured at local, regional, and national levels to ensure a seamless impact.
3. Strengthen Legal Frameworks for Youth Inclusion – Governments must legally recognize youth governance structures to ensure meaningful participation in decision-making.
4. Replicate Effective Models – Countries should adapt and scale successful approaches, such as the Philippines' youth councils and Liberia's FLY model, to enhance youth engagement in governance.

Barrail and Kpartor emphasized that for youth political engagement to be effective, governance structures must operate at all levels and be backed by strong legal mandates. By institutionalizing youth representation, governments can create sustainable pathways for young people to influence decision-making and governance beyond youth-specific policies.



Brian Githinji

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF POLICY ACTION INITIATIVE

Emphasized the need for youth inclusion beyond tokenism, highlighting barriers to political participation, climate action, and disinformation. He noted that bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining IDs prevent millions of young Kenyans from voting, undermining democratic engagement.

He called for policy reforms to ensure fair access to identification documents. On climate change, he criticized global double standards, where Africa is urged to adopt clean energy while wealthier nations continue fossil fuel extraction. He pointed out the disconnect between well-funded climate activism and under-supported grassroots efforts, urging investment in local adaptation initiatives.

Regarding disinformation, Githinji warned against governments using misinformation labels to suppress independent youth voices, calling for clear, transparent definitions to protect civic engagement. He stressed that youth representation must be merit-based rather than symbolic, advocating for systemic reforms that empower young people with opportunities, skills, and equitable participation in governance.



Range Mwita

HEAD OF PROGRAMS AT THE CENTRE FOR MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY KENYA

Emphasized the systematic disorganization of youth by institutions that should be enabling their participation. He highlighted the deliberate exclusion of young people from meaningful political engagement through structural barriers and lack of opportunities.

He urged youth to organize independently, build strong networks, and demand their rightful place in governance. Recognizing the high cost of elections, he emphasized the power of youth in numbers, technology, and strategy to not only vote but also safeguard electoral integrity by ensuring legitimate winners take office.



IGNITE SPEECH

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR DEMOCRACY

Hanifa Farsafi Adan, Human Rights Activist

Hanifa delivered a powerful Ignite speech, highlighting her journey as an activist and the impact of social media in advocating for social justice. She shared personal experiences of mobilizing online campaigns, addressing environmental injustice, and rallying youth participation in democracy. Hanifa recounted an incident where she leveraged social media to highlight an issue affecting school children in Nairobi. She took to Twitter, tagging the Governor of Nairobi vowing to campaign for 30 days until the matter was addressed. Within days, the issue gained traction, prompting a response from the governor. Though the initial attempt at resolution was inadequate, continued pressure led to a permanent fix. This experience demonstrated to her the power of digital activism. A problem that had persisted for over 30 years was resolved in just months through social media advocacy. This realization marked the beginning of her digital activism journey, which has now spanned four years. She emphasized that environmental injustice disproportionately affects the poor and marginalized, while the rich remain unaffected. She recounted the devastating floods in Kenya that led to the forced eviction of poor families without government support. Determined to help, she used social media to mobilize support. To her amazement, Kenyans came together, raising over 1 million KES to assist flood victims in affected areas such as Mathare, Korogocho, and Burma. With no government intervention, it was the people who provided food, mattresses, and blankets to those in need. This reinforced her belief in the power of social media to drive change.

Hanifa underscored the link between social media and democracy, stating that democracy is not given but built. She cited how social media has played a crucial role in demanding accountability from the government. She highlighted its effectiveness in mobilizing action, educating citizens, and amplifying voices against injustices. Hanifa detailed how the Gen Z protest against the Finance Bill 2024 emerged unexpectedly but grew into a national movement. Social media, particularly Twitter and TikTok, became platforms for educating people about the bill's punitive measures. Citizens began sharing contact details of Members of Parliament (MPs) and urging them to reject the bill. Despite widespread calls, MPs largely ignored the public's demands, prompting the first street protest on June 18. As the protests gained momentum, Hanifa and others fundraised for essential supplies like t-shirts and water. However, she was arrested immediately upon arriving at the protest. Despite attempts to instill fear, the movement only grew stronger. A viral campaign led to her release, alongside the call to free the over 300 protesters arrested that day. The protests resulted in tragic losses, with many young people killed and no accountability from the government. Hanifa firmly rejected any form of dialogue with the government, stating that they had moved past the stage of negotiations. One of the major achievements of the movement was the successful fundraising of 31 million KES to support injured protesters and families of those who lost their lives. Initially targeting 10 million KES, the campaign exceeded expectations, raising 14 million KES within hours. The funds facilitated medical aid, legal support, and other essential services, showcasing the power of unity and solidarity among Kenyans.

Hanifa concluded by reminding the youth of their power in shaping democracy and demanding accountability. She urged them to actively participate in governance, emphasizing that small actions can lead to significant change. She recounted her humble beginnings, emphasizing that genuine intent and persistence are key to making an impact. With a message of encouragement and solidarity, she reaffirmed her belief that while the fight is tough, victory is inevitable. Hanifa's speech was a testament to the transformative power of social media in activism, democracy, and social justice. Through digital mobilization and grassroots efforts, she demonstrated that change is possible when people unite for a common cause. Her message was clear: the youth have the power to shape their future, and they must continue to fight for accountability and justice.

IMPACT AND KEY OUTCOMES

The GDC Forum generated critical insights and actionable commitments to strengthen democratic resilience.

Key outcomes:

- Strengthened Democratic Institutions – Renewed commitment to upholding the rule of law, enforcing accountability, and ensuring free, fair, and credible elections.
- Electoral Integrity and Anti-Corruption Measures – Stronger safeguards against illicit campaign financing, vote-buying, and governance capture.
- Youth Leadership and Political Inclusion – Institutional support for youth participation, civic education, and political literacy to drive democratic renewal.
- Human Rights and Civic Space Protection – Enhanced legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to safeguard fundamental freedoms and democratic rights.
- Environmental Governance and Climate Justice – Prioritization of transparency, equity, and public participation in environmental policymaking and climate action, including equitable carbon credit redistribution and sustainable urbanization.
- Digital Innovation for Democracy – Leveraging technology to combat misinformation, enhance political transparency, and amplify citizen engagement in climate advocacy and governance.
- Grassroots Mobilization and Indigenous Knowledge – Strengthened community-led climate action, afforestation initiatives, and the preservation of traditional environmental management practices.
- Intergenerational and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration – Fostering long-term partnerships between governments, civil society, and marginalized communities to drive inclusive climate and governance reforms.



CALL TO ACTION

To sustain the momentum from the forum, stakeholders must commit to:

1. Institutionalize Reforms – Governments must implement policies that strengthen democratic institutions, curb corruption, and protect civic space.
2. Enhance Digital Security – Stakeholders must invest in digital resilience programs to counter cyber threats, misinformation, and electoral manipulation.
3. Ensure Electoral Transparency – Electoral bodies must enforce campaign finance regulations and eliminate barriers to inclusive political participation.
4. Strengthen Oversight and Accountability – Anti-corruption agencies and judicial bodies must be empowered to enforce governance integrity.
5. Support Youth and Grassroots Leadership – Governments, civil society, and international partners must provide funding and platforms for young leaders to drive democratic innovation
6. Advance Climate Governance – Governments must integrate environmental justice into democratic policies, ensuring equitable climate action and resource management.
7. Advance Sustainable Urbanization and Land Management – Implement policies that balance development with environmental conservation, prioritizing biodiversity protection and climate resilience.



Final Thoughts & CONCLUSION

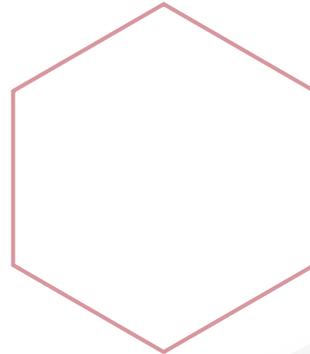
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The Global Democracy Coalition Africa Forum 2025 The GDC Forum reinforced the urgent need for decisive action in defending democracy, combating corruption, and integrating climate justice into governance frameworks. Sustainable change requires a unified commitment from governments, civil society, and citizens to uphold accountability, protect human rights, and foster inclusive, transparent, and resilient democratic institutions. The time to act is now





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