

DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE
FORUM ON THE PARTICIPATION OF NGOs IN THE 87TH ORDINARY
SESSION OF THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES'
RIGHTS

THEME OF THE YEAR 2026: "Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063."

Revised Draft 11th February 2026.

INTRODUCTION

At a time when Africa is confronted with overlapping crises of climate change, governance challenges, shrinking civic space, and persistent human rights violations, the need for solidarity and collective action has never been greater. The NGOs Forum organized by the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS) stands as a vital platform where brothers and sisters from across the continent gather to deliberate, share experiences, and chart pathways toward a better Africa. It is in such spaces that civil society finds strength, amplifies the voices of the marginalized, and builds consensus on solutions that reflect African realities and aspirations.

The Forum is more than a meeting; it is an avenue where pressing issues from peace and security to economic justice, cultural rights, and climate resilience are brought to the forefront, ensuring they are not ignored but addressed with urgency and depth. In this spirit, the Forum aligns itself with the African Union's Theme of the Year 2026, "*Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063.*" By anchoring discussions in this theme while also engaging with broader challenges such as unconstitutional changes of government, corrupt elections, and restrictions on civic space, the Forum underscores the interconnectedness of Africa's struggles and the importance of tackling them together.

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

Africa is facing a convergence of climate and governance crises that make the AU Theme of the Year 2026 "*Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063*" both urgent and deeply relevant. The evidence from across the continent shows that droughts, floods, and water scarcity are not isolated events but recurring challenges that undermine human rights, development, and peace.

Between 2023 and 2025, the **Horn of Africa** endured five consecutive failed rainy seasons, leaving **23.4 million people acutely food insecure and 5.1 million children malnourished**. An estimated **2.7 million people were displaced** by the drought, which devastated agriculture and livestock production¹

¹ [PolicyBrief-Financing Climate Resilience-Web.pdf](#)

Although Africa contributes only about 4% of global emissions, it is experiencing a disproportionately rapid rise in temperatures and faster-than-average sea level increases. In 2024, 11 million people across the continent were impacted by abnormal rainfall,² while the 2023/24 Southern African drought left 27 million people food insecure.³

At the same time, floods have become increasingly destructive. In **West and Central Africa**, torrential rains between October 2024 and May 2025 triggered catastrophic floods across 16 countries, affecting **6.8 million people** and destroying critical infrastructure during the agricultural season ⁴

Nigeria's 2022–2023 floods alone displaced **2.4 million people**, killed more than **600**, and destroyed **200,000 homes**, according to UNDP's *Nigeria Flood Impact, Recovery and Mitigation Assessment Report*.⁵ According to IFRC reports, as of 8 October 2022, about 2.8 million individuals were impacted by the flood, at least 6123 lives were lost, and more than 2500 people sustained injuries. An estimated two million people fled while others were evacuated from high-risk locations, taking just what they could carry with them and ending up in deplorable conditions with inadequate safeguards, exposing them to protection concerns.⁶ Similarly, **Cyclone Freddy in Mozambique (2023)** displaced **over 500,000 people**, destroyed infrastructure, and worsened cholera outbreaks.⁷

North Africa has also faced acute water stress. Reservoir levels in Morocco and Algeria dropped below **30% capacity**, forcing water rationing in urban centers. UNESCO's *World Water Development Report 2024* warned that water crises are exacerbating tensions and could fuel local or regional conflicts if not addressed through cooperation⁸ In Madagascar, northern regions experienced severe drought in 2025, leaving rural communities without reliable drinking water. The **2025 Africa Sustainable Development Report** noted that while Africa is making progress in 12 of the 17 SDGs, the pace is insufficient, with water insecurity and climate shocks among the biggest obstacles.⁹

Beyond climate, Africa continues to grapple with governance challenges that exacerbate these crises. Restrictions on civic space, unconstitutional changes of

² Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 'Record Levels of Flooding in Africa Compounds Stress on Fragile Countries' 10 December 2024, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/record-levels-of-flooding-in-africa-compounds-stress-on-fragile-countries/>

³ World Food Programme, 'Emergency: Southern Africa Drought', 2025, <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/southern-africa-drought>

⁴ [Nigeria Flood Impact, Recovery and Mitigation Assessment Report 2022-2023 | United Nations Development Programme](#)

⁵ [2025 Africa Sustainable Development Report | United Nations Development Programme](#)

⁶ [Geospatial Analysis of Flood Susceptibility in Nigeria's Vulnerable Coastal States: A Detailed Assessment and Mitigation Strategy Proposal | MDPI](#)

⁷ [Drought in the Horn of Africa: Situation Update, July 2023 - Ethiopia | ReliefWeb](#)

⁸ [2025 Africa Sustainable Development Report | United Nations Development Programme](#)

⁹ As above.

government, and corrupt elections weaken accountability and prevent effective responses to disasters. Without democratic integrity and strong institutions, resources are mismanaged, conflicts are fueled, and vulnerable populations are left behind.

The statistics and case studies from across Africa underscore why the AU's 2026 theme is timely. Water and sanitation are not merely technical issues; they are deeply political and human rights concerns and deeply rooted in the realization of Aspiration 1 of the African Union's Agenda 2063. Addressing them requires inclusive governance, regional cooperation, and strong civil society engagement. The NGOs Forum provides a critical platform for African voices to deliberate on these challenges, share experiences, and propose solutions that uphold dignity and advance sustainable development.

OBJECTIVES

The overarching objective of the NGOs Forum is to provide a platform for African civil society to deliberate on *Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063* while also addressing broader governance, human rights, and development challenges facing the continent. Specifically, the Forum seeks to:

1. **Amplify Voices:** Elevate the perspectives of communities most affected by water insecurity, climate disasters, and human rights violations.
2. **Promote Accountability:** Strengthen civil society's role in holding governments and institutions accountable for resource management, democratic integrity, and respect for rights.
3. **Foster Collaboration:** Create a space for NGOs across Africa to share experiences, strategies, and innovations in addressing interconnected challenges.
4. **Influence Policy:** Develop recommendations that inform AU member states, regional bodies, and international partners on rights-based approaches to water, governance, and peace.
5. **Build Solidarity:** Reinforce the collective strength of African civil society in resisting shrinking civic space and advancing inclusive development.

THEMATIC FOCUS

1. Water, Sanitation, and the Right to Development

Anchored in the AU Theme of the Year 2026, this sub-theme emphasizes water and sanitation as fundamental human rights and essential for achieving Agenda 2063. It highlights the intersection of water insecurity with poverty, education, health, and gender inequality, while underscoring the role of NGOs in advocating for equitable access, accountability, and community-driven solutions.

2. Civic Space, Governance, and Democratic Integrity

This sub-theme combines civic space, freedom of expression, digital rights, and unconstitutional changes of government. It addresses how restrictions on civic freedoms, corrupt elections, and shrinking digital rights undermine democracy and weaken civil society's ability to demand accountability. NGOs are called to defend civic space, monitor elections, and ensure that governance structures uphold human rights and democratic integrity.

3. Natural Resources, Environmental Justice, and Climate-Induced Migration

Here, the focus is on Africa's wealth of natural resources and the environmental challenges tied to their mismanagement. It integrates issues of ecological justice, climate change, and migration, showing how floods, droughts, and resource exploitation displace millions and threaten livelihoods. NGOs play a vital role in advocating for transparency, sustainable resource governance, and regional frameworks to protect displaced populations.

4. Peace, Security, and Human Rights

This sub-theme highlights the link between resource scarcity, governance failures, and conflict in regions such as the Sahel, Horn of Africa, and Great Lakes. It emphasizes the need to integrate human rights into peacebuilding strategies and to address root causes of insecurity, including climate stress and migration. NGOs are positioned as key actors in promoting preventive measures, resilience, and inclusive peace processes.

5. Social Inclusion: Gender, Youth, and Cultural Rights

This sub-theme brings together gender justice, youth empowerment, and indigenous knowledge. It underscores how women and youth are disproportionately affected by water scarcity, unemployment, and civic restrictions, while also recognizing the value of cultural rights and traditional practices in resource management. NGOs can showcase inclusive, community-led approaches that empower marginalized groups and integrate indigenous knowledge into sustainable development strategies.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

- **Inaugural Panel**

From Water Security to Human Security: Civil Society at the Heart of Africa's Future

This opening session will set the tone for the Forum by linking the AU Theme of the Year 2026 on water and sanitation to broader human security concerns. It will highlight how civil society is central to ensuring that resource governance, peace, and rights are addressed holistically.

Proposed panelists: water policy specialists, public health professionals, climate resilience researchers, and human rights advocates.

- **Panel 1**

Safeguarding Civic Space and Freedom of Expression in Africa

The conversation will focus on the growing restrictions on civic space and digital freedoms, examining how these undermine advocacy and accountability. NGOs will share strategies for protecting activists, resisting censorship, and strengthening democratic participation.

Proposed panelists: legal professionals on constitutional rights, digital rights activists, media freedom specialists, and civil society leaders.

- **Panel 2**

Natural Resources, Environmental Justice, and Economic Inequality: Strengthening the Protection of Natural Resources through Indigenous Community Governance and Community-Driven Development (CDWD)

Deliberations here will explore how mismanagement of Africa's natural resources perpetuates inequality and conflict. Transparency, ecological justice, and community participation will be emphasized as key priorities for NGOs advocating for people-centered resource governance.

Proposed panelists: environmental justice advocates, economists, governance and transparency experts, and community development practitioners.

- **Panel 3**

Peace, Security, and Unconstitutional Changes of Government

Attention will turn to the rise of coups, corrupt elections, and governance failures across Africa, and their impact on peace and stability. The dialogue will also examine how resource scarcity, particularly water, exacerbates tensions, and how civil society can strengthen democratic integrity and peacebuilding.

Proposed panelists: peace and conflict resolution specialists, democracy and governance analysts, election monitoring experts, and regional security researchers.

- **Panel 4**

Gender, Youth, and Cultural Rights in Africa's Future

The exchange will highlight the intersection of gender justice, youth empowerment, and cultural rights in shaping Africa's development. Innovative approaches to leadership and advocacy will be showcased, alongside recognition of indigenous knowledge systems in resource governance.

Proposed panelists: gender equality advocates, youth empowerment leaders, cultural rights scholars, and social innovation practitioners.

- **Panel 5**

The poor waste management as an obstacle to sanitation

Waste management in Africa is facing increasing pressure due to rapid urbanization and a sharp rise in waste production: The amount of municipal waste is expected to almost double between 2020 and 2050. However, only a minority of waste is properly collected and treated; around 36% of municipal waste is collected, compared to a much higher global average. Much of the waste ends up in open dumps, often without health and environmental controls, posing serious risks to public health and the environment.

Proposed Panelists: local government authorities, environmental and sanitation agencies, civil society organizations, waste management service providers, community leaders, and public health experts

Expected Outcomes

By the end of the Forum, participants are expected to achieve:

1. **A Common Civil Society Declaration (NGOs Statement):** A unified statement reflecting NGO perspectives on water, sanitation, governance, and human rights, to be presented to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.
2. **Strengthened Networks:** Enhanced collaboration among NGOs across regions, fostering solidarity and joint advocacy on shared challenges such as climate change, civic space, and governance.
3. **Capacity Building:** Improved knowledge and strategies among NGOs for addressing complex issues like climate-induced migration, gendered impacts of water scarcity, and digital rights.
4. **Visibility of Human Rights Issues:** Greater awareness of ongoing violations from restrictions on civic space to unconstitutional changes of government and their intersection with resource governance.
5. **Resolutions, Recommendations, and Documentation:** A comprehensive report summarizing the discussions, key findings, and recommendations from the forums, including the adoption of resolutions and recommendations for onward submission to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) for consideration during its 87th Ordinary Session.

TARGET AUDIENCE:

- African and International NGOs
- Human Rights Defenders

- Policy makers and Government Officials
- Regional and International Organizations
- Academia and researchers
- Civil Society Organizations.
- Media

LANGUAGES: TBC

Date 7th - 9th May 2026

Venue: The Gambia