



The East African
Civil Society
Summit 2024



**REPORT OF THE 2024
EA CSO SUMMIT**



BACKGROUND

ABOUT EACSOF

The East African Civil Society Organisations Forum (EACSOF) is among the most diverse and active regional CSO platforms on the African Continent. EACSOF membership convenes all Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations, and Community Based Organisations in East African Community. It enables CSO to work together to amplify East African citizens' collective power to contribute fully to policy formulation/ review for increased socio-economic growth in the EAC integration process.



EACSOF's strong networks and convening power brings together the leading actors in civil society in East Africa to amplify citizens' voices and concerns above important matters in order to complement Governments' initiatives and hasten social development in the EAC. Since its founding in 2007, EACSOF has been central in strengthening institutionalisation structures and the relationship between CSOs and the East African Community Secretariat, organs and institutions. EACSOF is mandated as the Voice of civil society in the EAC integration process as outlined in the EAC Consultative Dialogue Framework (CDF).

ABOUT THE SUMMIT

EACSOFF's strong networks and convening power provide the platform to bring together the leading actors in civil society in East Africa to amplify the voices as well as share concerns and critical issues that are central to citizens of the region. We strongly believe that when citizens across East Africa are mobilized and supported to participate meaningfully in regional integration processes, the EAC's policies formulation and program implementation will have a lasting impact. The involvement of citizens will also speed up the implementation of policies that promote citizens interests and eliminate barriers to participation in regional processes and opportunities. After organizing the first Summit in 2023, the East African Civil Society Organizations' Forum, (EACSOFF)organized the 2024 East African Citizens Summit under the theme Harnessing Citizens' Potential in Regional Integration Processes: Utilizing technological advancement to resolve climate change challenges and ensure food security in the region.

Objectives of the 2024 Summit

- 1.To invigorate the social contact between EAC Citizens and the East African Community and re-establish civil society as a partner in regional economic development in East Africa
- 2.To strengthen EACSOFF focal country chapters by linking them to the National Ministries of EAC for recognition.
- 3.To share outcomes and results from the 2023 Summit and other engagements



PROFILE OF CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS AND SPEAKERS



The East African Civil Societies Summit brought together over 300 participants (in person as well as online) from Civil society, the EAC institutions and organs, the EAC Partner States, academia, and development partners from the East African region and beyond.

We are grateful to the honoured speakers at the 2024 summit, who brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to various discussions regarding regional integration, trade, civic space, technology, culture, and much more. Their keen insights as industry leaders, along with participants' contributions in plenary discussions, contributed to developing proposals on how to tackle development challenges.

Summit partners and sponsors

We are grateful to our sponsors of this Summit, Oxfam, EU and Stanbic Bank for their continuing financial and technical support to the East African Civil Society Organizations Forum. Additionally, we appreciate the efforts and guidance provided by the Summit planning committee consisting of members of the EACSOF Governing Council and EACSOF national chapters.



PROFILE OF CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS AND SPEAKERS HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS AT THE SUMMIT

The Summit facilitated thematic discussions between CSOS and Government Officials, representatives from the EAC secretariat, EALA parliamentarians, and MEACAs. The insights from these thematic discussions will guide how relevant actors address the current regional, continental and global issues.

Throughout the sessions, attendees actively engaged in stimulating discussions, fostering an atmosphere of collaboration and innovation. The presentations delivered by esteemed speakers were thought-provoking, shedding light on cutting-edge developments and emerging trends. The conference provided a platform for participants to share their ideas, challenges, and successes, encouraging fruitful interactions and networking opportunities.

OPENING CEREMONY:



The East Africa Civil Society Summit was officially opened with a recitation of the Tanzanian and the East African Community anthems. The guest of honour at this auspicious occasion was Rt Hon Joseph Ntakirutimana, speaker for EALA. The opening ceremony began with Ms. Lillian Alex, CEO of EACSO welcoming members of Civil Society present from DRC, South Sudan, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania and recognition of other key participants including development partners, sponsors, partners, EACSO National chapters, and Members of the EACSO Governing Council.



Mr. Yakani, President of the EACSOF Governing Council stressed that collaboration between governments, private sector, civil society, and regional organizations is key. Mr. Yakani urged participants to work together to create an enabling environment for technological innovation and adoption. This includes investing in research and development, improving infrastructure, and creating policies that support innovation and protect our environment. He urged participants to remember that our greatest resource is our people. By harnessing the potential and encouraging the participation of East African citizens, we can drive regional integration, combat climate change, and ensure food security for generations to come.

Mr. Bill Marwa from Oxfam International welcomed participants and stated that Oxfam is a key partner to civil society in the region and supports collaboration among CSOs and other partners to overcome obstacles and achieve their vision.



Ms. Doreen Dominique, head of public sector from Stanbic Bank welcomed delegates and shared the banks vision for a peaceful thriving region and the potential for economic growth in the region. She shared -

that Stanbic Bank supports entrepreneurs, innovators and start-ups as well as NGOs by providing non commercial entity account which will improve operations. They also support various communities through CSR projects in education health and climate, by providing health insurance, building schools, providing medical equipment, planting trees etc.

Ms Florence, the representative from the regions Ministries of EAC Affairs from Uganda shared her pleasure at being invited to the summit. She stressed that engagement of civil society, private sector and other interest groups, as enshrined in the treaty establishing the EAC is a key aspect of integration. She went on to expound on citizen engagement frameworks including the consultative dialogue framework.



The representative from URT, the permanent secretary Min of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Stephen Mbundi welcomed participants to Tanzania and Arusha. He mentioned that he was pleased that the EACSOFTanzania chapter has been formally constituted and registered. He made a commitment that the resolutions from this summit will be considered by the relevant parties. He also shared that the EAC is working hard to ensure the SG Forum takes place in the coming financial year.

The honourable speaker for EALA led participants in a moment of silence to honour the late Dr Shogo, stating that EAC has lost a bright star in Hon. Dr Shogo from Tanzania. The honourable speaker went on to provide his keynote address he reminded participants that EALA are here for the benefit of our citizens and invited dialogues in good and bad times as it builds.



REFLECTING ON ACTIVE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE EAC REGION

SPEAKERS ON THIS PANEL: HON. KENNEDY MUKULIA- CHAIR GPC- EALA, HON. YUFNALIS OKUBO FORMER REGISTRAR EACJ, MR. DANIEL LEMA - EACSOF TANZANIA. MODERATOR: MR. DON DEYA - PALU



The discussions on this panel explored the positive aspects of citizen engagement in regional integration as well as the areas that may be improved. The moderator, Mr Donald Deya, started off by providing an overview and stated that the East African Community is just one tool of Pan-Africanism. At the regional level, there are many different organs and institutions in which we can engage, including the summit, sectoral committees, the court of justice, the legislative assembly, not just the EAC secretariat. Some of the institutions and commissions are legacies from the previous EAC but others are new institutions. It is possible to engage these institutions on specific issues such as health, children's rights, digital rights, etc. Mr. Deya recommended that EACSOF develop an EAC activity tracker to track how we engage and ensure quality of engagement, and quantity of engagement at the regional level. Additionally, he recommended that the summit introduce awards, including the Prof. Hroub Othman Award for individuals, NGOs, and institutions and a Zephania Ubwani award to recognize excellence in reporting at the regional level. These are two distinguished gentlemen who were great supporters of EACSOF and of the regional integration agenda.

The panelists began by sharing what has gone well in the regional integration agenda. Hon. Mukulia Kennedy, GPC chairperson, shared his insights on what worked well. The Legislative Assembly is citizen-focused as it is the only organ in which members are elected by citizen representatives. Additionally, all bills are subjected to public consultation and CSOs are part of thematic groups to bring in the views of CSOs and citizens. About 75% of the laws passed by EALA have been assented to by the Heads of Summit. The panellist also shared that members of the public are allowed to attend EALA plenary sessions. They may present a petition or Bills for consideration. However, partnerships can be strengthened because most sessions are held in Arusha, meaning the integration agenda does not reach most citizens.

Madam Florence, the representative of the Ministries responsible for EAC affairs, shared that citizen engagement through the consultative dialogue framework is provided for under the Treaty and that all the MEACAs have taken it upon themselves to institutionalize the CDF and are engaging citizens at different levels.



Hon Okubo highlighted that any amendment of the EAC Treaty must involve citizens, stressing that we have the power. There is a Court order in place that makes any attempt to make amendments to the Treaty without citizen participation null and void. The EACJ has also ensured that election of members of EALA must be proper elections through their rulings.

Mr Lema informed participants that the legislative process involves citizens, as was the case in the development of the HIV and AIDS bill by EALA. It has not been the same with all legislations but that was an excellent example. Additionally, he praised the EACJ, which has pronounced itself clearly on some major issues. Although there are shortfalls in implementation, we are happy with their sovereignty.



Panelists shared their insights on what hasn't gone well in the regional integration agenda. This discussion included concerns about the operational structure, financing and ownership of the integration agenda. They stressed the need to update the Treaty stating that it is important to remember that the community will be celebrating its silver jubilee and the treaty was written when there were only 3 members.

Another key challenge is that the EAC has a top-bottom operational structure as decisions are made at the highest level thus making buy-in on the East Africa Community a little bit harder due to limited awareness of the benefits of integration to citizens and CSOs. There has been a political capture of the regional integration processes leaving out Civil society and citizens who are not properly empowered to make meaningful contributions. Additionally, the dialogue process as envisioned by the treaty was meant to be continuous however, the resourcing of the CDF and the consistency of hosting the SG Forum has been patchy.



In regards to the imposition of non-tariff barriers, the experience of women, men, and youth in business is that they are unable to push commodities beyond the borders to access markets. The moderator challenged participants to consider how they can engaged the MEACAs in resolving some of the issues faced.

Another challenge raised is that there are no codified ways for new members to join the EAC. The procedures do not specify who should be on the committee to review applicants, and whether or not the recommendations are followed.

Participants were encouraged to keep interrogating the budget of the EAC to ensure that a line item for public participation in the budget, even if symbolic at first, the community can work to build it up.

Resolutions and recommendations from this panel

1. Participants called for the EAC Treaty to be updated as it was put in place 25 years ago
2. CSOs should keep interrogating the budget of the EAC and advocate for a budget for engagement
3. Recommendations from the SG Forum and the CSO Summit should go to the Council of Ministers so that they go back to partner States as directives and decisions.
4. Institute an EACSOE regional integration tracker and awards to honour engagement
5. CSOs need to own the engagement processes at the regional level and support the operationalization of EACSOE as an institute so as to ensure effective engagement of citizens with the EAC.

DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN EAST AFRICA REGION- GAINS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

SPEAKER: DR SARAH BIRETE- CHAIRPERSON, E-HORN



This keynote presentation by Dr. Sarah Birete considered the state of democracy and democratization in east Africa. The speaker began by stating that democracy cannot be judged by the ability to vote or fundamental rights and freedoms. There are various schools of thought, one being that democracy is in a decline in many countries. Another school of thought is that for Africans, this is an imported phenomenon -

and we have failed to cope with it. However, if you look at our traditional governance systems, the king and royal family acted as the executive, the council of elders acted as the legislature, and the chief priest who acted as the judiciary. In essence, the key offices still existed in African culture we just changed how we elect them to occupy these arms of government

The political economy of the East African region faces various challenges including increased monetization of electoral processes, grand corruption, civil and armed conflicts continue to challenge democratic consolidation eg in DRC, unconstitutional changes of governments & undefined or failed transitions eg in Uganda, prolonged development of constitution in South Sudan, the evasion of term limits & abuse of incumbency, co-opted and weak institutions of democracy & weak countervailing institutions and enforcement mechanisms, weak citizens' agency inhibiting pushback, ethnic, social and religious balkanization, general apathy & disinterestedness in electoral processes in the region, lack of elite consensus, lack of proper vetting of candidates, as well as shrinking of civic space and civil liberties. The democracy index indicates the performance of EHOA member states Tanzania is ranked at 86, Kenya 92, Uganda at 99, Rwanda at 117, Burundi is 147, DRC is 160, and Sudan at 158. According to these statistics, Tanzania is the best performing and Kenya has declined compared to previous ranking.

Challenges of electoral democracy in the region include the legacy of one-party rule, limited political competition, lack of thorough vetting of candidates/aspirants, burdensome party nomination processes, questionable integrity of election dispute resolution processes and political party patronage. This leads to high levels of public distrust in electoral processes and their outcomes because of electoral system deficits, disputed results, violence and intimidation divisive political campaigns and perceived lack of independence of Election Management Bodies. There are also high levels of impunity, state capture of independent institutions and offices.

The AHEAD project is working towards improving the transparency and credibility of elections in Africa through the institutional strengthening of citizen observer networks, increasing evidence base on electoral governance, reinvigorating spaces for dialogue on election follow-up, building a community of practice support, and enhancing civic engagement.

Resolutions and recommendations from this panel

1. There is a need for an independent, fearless, and transformative judiciary, progressive civic awareness among citizens of the region, independent institutions to provide institutional and democratic safeguards, constitutional and legal reforms to sustain a vibrant Civil Society movement

CLIMATE CHANGE AND AGRICULTURE; AGRIBUSINESS AS THE BACKBONE OF THE EAST AFRICAN ECONOMY

**SPEAKERS ON THIS PANEL: SEATINI UGANDA, AMANI TEMU - TAHA, KAFEERO HERBERT SEATINI, NESTORY MUSHI- YOUTH FOR CLIMATE ACTION.
MODERATOR: MR. DOUGLAS WANJA - D4GA**

The discussions on this panel explored the effects and impacts of climate change in the region. The moderator started the discussions off with an overview of the situations we have witnessed due to climate variability recently including increasing global temperatures, as well as floods in low lands. The speaker shared that climate change is being driven by human activities, however, Africa is only responsible for about 40% of global emissions yet we are suffering the consequences. As such, we must prepare and build resilience to mitigate and adapt.

Mr. Wanja informed participants that Afrobarometer has rich data from 42 countries that can be used as an early warning system. Findings show that citizens feel that the government has a high responsibility regarding climate change. The data also tells us where work needs to be done to enhance understanding. For instance, only 32% of Tanzania's population knows about climate change.



Mr. Mushi shared that it was critical to engage children and young people on climate change by setting up clubs, tree nurseries, and educating the community. At the regional level there are various cross border collaborations, engagement and programs.

Mr. Temu shared about TAHA which is a private sector organisation that engages in advocacy in the region educate and support farmers to attain standards. Climate change is negatively impacting agriculture, the economy, we are seeing more invasive pest as well as a decline in crop yield as seeds are no longer tolerant to the impact of climate change.



He stressed that we should invest in research and development, especially on seed varieties, if left to the private sector they have their own interests. It is important as a continent to have ownership of our seed varieties and protect indigenous seeds so we do not lose the varieties we have. Most agricultural production in the region is rainfed, there is low uptake of technology and we are investing more production of cash crops rather than foodstuff. We should invest in biotech and innovate using technology to help increase yields. We should also protect agricultural land because most land that were previously agricultural land is being turned into commercial or residential areas and create an enabling business environment so enterprises can thrive.



Resolutions and recommendations from this panel

1. Continue to sensitize citizens on the actions they need to take to mitigate and adapt to climate change
2. Increase resourcing of agriculture for food production rather than cash crops
3. Train youth on environmental disaster management, provide funds to implement projects, and document the ongoing activities

CSO RESILIENCE IN THE REGION

SPEAKERS ON THIS PANEL: EUNICE KAMAU – INUKA KENYA, HON. GEORGE ODONG - EALA UGANDA, MS. VICKNESS MAYAO- REGISTRAR OF NGOS TANZANIA, MR. CHRIS NKWATSIIBWE – UNGOF, MR. MORRIS ODHIAMBO- EACSO KENYA CHAPTER. MODERATOR: MS. ANNA HENGA, LHRC



The discussions on this panel explored issues around resilience of CSOs. CSO resilience is both the process and outcome of successfully adapting to challenges or difficulties faced. It was defined as the ability of the CSOs to overcome the challenges and continue operating. It is important to note that in many situations, CSOs have positively influenced government policy, and initiated reforms and laws for the betterment of society. INUKA Kenya representative shared findings from a study on CSO resilience in East Africa, focusing on Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. She stressed that civil society plays a crucial role in community engagement and advocacy for change. Speakers and participants agreed that there is a need for civil society to build resilience in order to sustain impact on key issues of community engagement, governance and democracy.



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Notable trends in the civic space include non-adherence to rule of law, denial of funding for CSOs by closing down existing avenues for funding for key donors or attempts to enact laws to restrict funding, denying citizens the rights to freedom of association and expression by criminalising protests and harming protesters. Shifts in funding priorities by donors and development partners also create a burden for CSOs.

Many CSOs have been silenced by the actions of government and are less vocal and the situation has made it difficult for CSOs to operate leading to some ending their operations. Some CSOs have found creative ways to keep working despite challenges, by engaging in processes to challenge government actions that inhibit their operation while some CSOs in the region have changed their mandate.

In order to build resilience, it is recommended that CSOs build coalitions at various levels to diversify its resource base, design interventions to respond to the challenges faced, strengthen knowledge building and evidence-based advocacy, engage in targeted capacity building, invest in technology, strengthen security training and increase community outreach. Additionally, a crisis response plan including cultivating support from government and allies. The study findings reveal how various CSOs are responsible for the challenges in their environment. What builds resilience are proactive and reactive measures and strategies.

On the issue of developing a regional CSO Bill, it is essential to note that effective legislation is one that reflects the realities of the operating environment, the sentiments of the people it is supposed to serve and provides a supportive framework for that interest group to achieve its objectives. EALA is currently exhausting the conversations around processing the Bill, that will reflect the intentions and aspirations of the CSOs.

To that extent, the legislative assembly will do its best to make sure that; the provisions of the Bill reflect the outcomes of their conversations with different stakeholders in EAC partner states. However, on the issue of implementation of legislation at the national and regional level, there is a contestation of power between the state and civil society. The history of civil society organizations is one of positive defiance. The actions of CSOs often reflect the deficit in the efficiency and effectiveness of government. He encouraged CSOs to continue demanding spaces and constructively engaging on the Bill to ensure it is well crafted and effective and allows them to exercise their rights within the context of the law.

Enhancing connection with the community we claim to represent is also crucial. It is not uncommon to find organizations completely out of touch with the lived realities of their constituents. In such situations, citizens don't defend CSO interests if they are under threat due to disconnection. Regarding collaboration, often, CSOs do not trust each other. As we look at resilience among CSOs, we also need to consider how the CSOs have contributed to shrinking their own space by competing for resources. It is important to have solidarity among CSOs in addressing issues, especially in countries where civic space is restricted. International organizations and service provider organisations set themselves apart and do not support governance CSO thinking that governance matters do not concern. Those working in service delivery and those in governance and advocacy need to synergise and recognize that they depend on each other.

Resolutions and recommendations from this panel

1. CSOs should put in place the strategies outlined to build their resilience, including putting in place a crisis response plan, building coalitions, strengthening knowledge-building and evidence-based advocacy, engaging in targeted capacity building, investing in technology, strengthening security training, and increasing community outreach.
 2. Governments are advised to change their perception towards CSOs, tap into their technical capacities, and create a favorable environment for their operations
 3. Donors and development partners need to demonstrate more commitment towards safeguarding civic space and build solidarity and influence
 4. CSOs are encouraged to explore and build our potential for local philanthropy
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PROTECTING AND PROMOTING TRADITIONAL CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

SPEAKERS: MS. AYATA WANGUSA - CEDEA, MR. ALIAS OLE MORINDAT

The discussions on this panel explored how to promote traditional cultural knowledge. Mr. Morindat spoke to participants about his experiences as a herder and activist. Natural resources such as pastures and land, are key pillars of pastoralism. The second pillar is the livestock, and the third pillar is the social institutions. Many aspects of our culture have been lost and disconnected due to the impact of religion, modernization, and education designed to domesticate rather than liberate. The African human experience is facing a dilemma and is at a crossroads. Oral traditions such as storytelling and music are moving into different formats (books, recordings).

It is difficult to recapture what we have lost; we cannot really reverse the train. In terms of trade - Creative products have two facets, one side represents our identity, and the other the economic value and should be treated as a unique product.



Resolutions and recommendations from this panel

1. Introducing Indigenous and cultural knowledge into the education system and putting in place modalities for intergenerational exchanges
2. Recognize the vital role of our culture and traditional knowledge and promote intangible knowledge preservation especially as far as early warning for climate variation
3. Community engagement is critical. There is a need to decolonize ourselves, tap into the existing knowledge, and locate our traditional knowledge and expertise as critical at all levels

INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY: HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY FOR DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION

SPEAKERS ON THIS PANEL: MR. BILL MARWA - DIGITAL HEAD, OXFAM AFRICA, MS. RACHEL CHAGONJA - CEO NACONGO, MR. BARAKA MLINGA, REPRESENTATIVE FROM STANBIC BANK, MS. JANE MUYA - DIGITAL SPACE AND RIGHTS OFFICER AT OXFAM KENYA



The discussions on this panel explored the role of CSOs in promoting digital rights, countering challenges, modalities for balancing national security with digital freedoms and the importance of public awareness and education. The moderator started the discussions by inviting participants to define digital rights which are closely linked to freedom of expression and privacy and allow people to access create content and use digital media and other electronic devices. Everyone should be able to enjoy the same fundamental rights offline and online.

Digital technology is very relevant in this era for information, research and data for advocacy. Digital technology has made it easier for CSOs and citizens to access information, is a driver for development, and as such, it is essential to foster a vibrant and inclusive digital ecosystem. Some of the significant challenges faced by CSOs in promoting digital rights security include restrictive policy and regulatory frameworks, unauthorised data breaches and cyber-attacks that compromise safety, online extremism and limited funding to promote digital movements.

Digital security regulations throughout the region have been used to justify arrests and curtail the work of the CSOs, including targeting activists. There is a need for policy changes and enhanced cross-sectoral collaboration. CSOs can collaborate with private sector and government actors to promote digital rights through policy advocacy and dialogues, capacity building, research and data sharing, and awareness campaigns.



Strategies to raise public awareness and educate citizens include recognition of the advantages the digital space has provided in online spaces e.g. two protests in Kenya including the femicide and protest against the Finance bill that is ongoing all started from social media through hashtags. It helps people air views and coordinate and mobilize populations in conversations that they would otherwise be sidelined from engaging. We need to be intentional and aware of the circumstances of the target audience, considering and customizing the best avenue to engage different actors, e.g. TikTok Instagram or X for youth engagement and radio shows and town halls for the elderly people. Break information down to allow engagement. Regarding access to internet connectivity, Africa still has only 40% access to internet infrastructure.

Resolutions and recommendations from this panel

1. CSOs should consider how to bridge the gap in terms of access to internet connectivity and undertake advocacy to uphold digital freedoms

REFLECTIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS SUMMIT RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION STATUS

SPEAKERS: MS. LILIAN ALEX, MS. FLORENCE FROM MEACA UGANDA AND HON. MBUDI TANZANIA MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, EAC DEPARTMENT



The discussions explored the progress on advocacy of recommendations on issues raised at the 2023 CSO summit and how to get headway in advocating on the issues emerging in the current summit.



Ms Alex shared the recommendations from the previous summit but on the proviso that the participants recognize that, unfortunately, the recommendations did not reach the relevant actors.

Hon. Mbudi and Madam Florence shared their key insights on how to tackle the issues raised in the previous summit allowing participants to gain deeper insights into historical aspects and political considerations to move forward the recommendations. Hon. Mbudi made a commitment to being fully engaged in following up the recommendations from the 2024 summit. He further committed to providing support in EACSOFs' quest for observer status and allocation of land to establish offices in an effort to enhance citizen engagement in regional integration.

TRADE AND INVESTMENT IN THE EAC REGION

SPEAKERS ON THIS PANEL: MR. JOHN BOSKO KALISA - C.E.O. EABC, MS. JANE NALUNGA - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SEATINI UGANDA, HON. GEORGE ODONGO - EALA MEMBER, REPRESENTATIVE FROM STANBIC BANK TANZANIA



This panel's discussions explored how well domestic markets are organised to accommodate international trade developments and how international treaties serve the best interests of EAC citizens. Discussions focused on the EAC's readiness to trade under the Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and how to unlock its potential.

The AfCFTA is all about buying and selling goods and services around the continent. Eritrea is the only country that has not signed and ratified the agreement while 54 countries have signed and ratified it. All our countries are highly indebted, and we need income to service our debt, as well as provide social amenities and investment opportunities.

We are spending a lot of resources towards repaying and servicing our debt rather than on services such as education, health, infrastructure and investment. AfCFTA came in at a time when we need to revitalise our economies after many economies have been injured by calamities like COVID 19, climate change. We need trade to increase our income. AfCFTA is adding to trade opportunities, including our domestic markets, the East African Community, and the continent at large. We need to ensure our trading environment is right for our SMEs, women, youth as there is a strong appetite and interest for our countries to trade. Implementation of the AfCFTA has the potential to have an impact on poverty reduction and job creating.



The EAC Treaty invites various actors including private sector to engage in integration matters. For integration to work, it must be people centred and people driven, however the integration has been hijacked by the politicians. CSO, private sector actors and the citizens need to reclaim their seats at the integration table. In reality, EAC integration has not worked in terms of how

citizens benefit from the good environment of trade and investment in the region. The AfCFTA is a flagship of the Africa we want. We need borderless East Africa for trade and investment and in Africa for the AfCFTA to realize its aspirations. Our customs systems must be harmonized to remove trade barriers. We need to align our interests with civil society, the private sector, and the government working together.

The EAC is recognized as a building block of the AfCFTA as it is predicated upon the success of RECs. The assumption is that the RECs have achieved a certain level of integration and can be leveraged by this new initiative for advancing a Pan-African trade agenda. However, the RECs have not deepened their integration and therefore cannot provide the pillar on which we can build a pan-African trade agenda.

EAC is celebrated as the best, fastest-growing economic bloc in Africa. In terms of the structure, we have done a good job in terms of laws, policies, institutions and protocols. However, on the issue of implementation, we are stuck, where the rubber meets the road is where our challenge comes in and we begin to question our preparedness to embrace the AfCFTA initiative. As CSOs, we need to have an extensive audit of our frameworks, commitments, trade practices, ambitions, and policies to determine whether they are really practical. EAC only functions through the implementation of partner states.

Resolutions and recommendations from this panel

1. We urge our government to look at trade holistically so that traders, manufacturers, and SMEs have affordable finance, work towards removing NTBs, and to put in place policies to make trade beneficial to the citizens
2. Invite and engage immigration departments at conferences such as these so that when they are informed about the CFTA agendas and the regional integration aspirations, they reduce incumbrances.

CHOICELESS DEMOCRACY: MAKING ELECTIONS WORK

SPEAKERS ON THIS PANEL: MR. MARCUS A. AGENGA - ELOG & MR. FELIX KAFUUMA - AFEONET, DR SARAH BIREETE - AFEONET, MR. MULLE MUSAU - REGIONAL COORDINATOR-E-HORN, MR. HENRY MUUGUZI – COORDINATOR AFEONET



The discussions on this panel explored the key issues that continue to impede civic space, elections and democracy in the region. The issues raised reflect the earlier presentation by Dr. Birette concerning governance and democracy in the region. Often, election laws are not well implemented, and even where they are good, they do not benefit the electorate. Incumbents taking advantage of governments' resources makes it a forgone conclusion that they are likely to get back in power. On the issue of commercialization of democracy, one of the tools used to entrench self into power, is money. An election should be an expression of the will of the people but often they are simply about money.

If used well technology can help with transparency, however, issues of distortion and manipulation of information of data and influence voters. Technology can improve the manner in which elections are conducted and make the processes efficient and transparent, making election results undisputed and incontestable.

In the region, we have tried to employ tech with some levels of success, technology has upscaled the voters' role, helped in timely transmission of electoral results but a major concern is that the costs of elections has been driven up due to tech. Additionally, we must remain cautious because artificial intelligence may be employed for misinformation, hate speech, data mining, etc.

Resolutions and recommendations from this panel

1. Reclaim citizen agency, mobilize the citizenry to vote and engage in democratic processes
2. We should embrace technology moving forward
3. Ensure that the technology for democracy is simple, secure, verifiable, and accountable
4. There is a need for independent and accountable judicial systems in EAC

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF YOUTH IN ADVANCING DEMOCRACY AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND ADDRESS THE MULTIFACETED CHALLENGES IMPEDING THEIR MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT.

SPEAKERS ON THIS PANEL: MS. GRACE WANGECHI- INDEPENDENT MEDICAL LEGAL UNIT (IMLU), MR. SUBA CHURCHILL- KENYA NATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY CENTRE, MS. VIOLET AYOUB – VISION FOR YOUTH, TANZANIA.



The discussions on this panel explored how young people can drive innovation in regional integration efforts and protected from profiling. It is important to take note of the fact that youth are not a homogeneous group and are as diverse in their experiences and needs as other segments of society. Some of the groups of youths that have been left behind include less privileged youths, youth with disabilities, young people in rural areas with no access to technology, graduates, grassroots youth, the internally displaced youths (Refugees) young people that are out of institutions (after rehabilitation, post basic education, post university).

The panel discussed the role our respective governments play to ensure that young people are not profiled in democratic/ constitutional processes by the security agencies to protect them against torture, extra judicial killings and enforced disappearances.



Ms. Grace Wangechi shared findings that documented 495 cases of human rights violations in 2023. The right to protest is in jeopardy because even though provided for in the Constitution Art 37, the state still subjects the people to torture and inhumane treatment. Additionally, the laws on prevention of terrorism, terrorism financing, and anti-money laundering have been used -

to target youth as potential terrorist suspects. It is important to identify Laws that profile youth and challenge their legality.

We need to ensure that more young people can be represented at the regional level by being included in decision-making and leadership positions, having formal platforms, and using technology and social media. Youth affairs need to be financed to support them to engage. Participants and panelists also discussed economic empowerment which is very important to ensure financial stability among the youth. Some of the major challenges include regulatory and non-tariff barriers, high taxes, limited access to capital, lack of information, and limited market access and networking opportunities. Technology and media are important tools for empowerment engagement. However, there is also a risk associated with misinformation.



Resolutions and recommendations from this panel

1. Support young people's right to picket and be protected from torture and other inhumane treatment
2. Support young people to engage in business opportunities across the region
3. EACSOF to ensure that young people are represented at the leadership level at the Governing Council and institute mentorship programs

INCLUSION OF CHILDREN IN REGIONAL INTEGRATION

SPEAKERS ON THIS PANEL: MR. BEN OMILO, MS. MICHELLA RANIERI - GLOBAL COALITION TO PROTECT EDUCATION FROM ATTACK, MR. DOUGLAS WANJA-D4GA, MS. ALICE KARANJA - APHRC, TERESIA AND MOHAMMED- APHRC



In these discussions, the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) presented a compelling case on the critical nexus between education, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and other child rights policies at the East African Community (EAC) and Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) Summit. APHRC noted that comprehensive education programs that integrate SRHR information and skills are fundamental to advancing child rights and fostering sustainable development in the region. Drawing on research, APHRC demonstrated how comprehensive education not only empowers young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions about their health and well-being but also promotes gender equality and reduces incidences of child marriage, teenage pregnancies, and gender-based violence.



The presentation called for robust policy frameworks that ensure inclusive, quality education and accessible SRHR services, advocating for a collaborative approach among EAC member states to address these interconnected issues holistically. The summit acknowledged APHRC's insights as pivotal in shaping future strategies and commitments towards enhancing the rights and opportunities of children and adolescents across East Africa.

As such, APHRC presented on a flagship project funded by Wellcome dubbed #Visibilize4ClimateAction, making visible the impacts of climate change on nutritional status of children under-5 and women of reproductive age and mental health among vulnerable populations in East African drylands (Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania), to catalyse climate action at scale. The goal is to stimulate intersectoral climate action through research, public and policy engagement. The project will also engage policy and practice actors to catalyse context-appropriate climate action. Stay tuned for updates on progress.



The Safe Schools Declaration is an international commitment that expresses support for the protection of students, teachers, and their schools during armed conflict. It stresses the importance of continued education during emergencies, something that is often disrupted. Governments can sign the Declaration to show their support and commitment to the Guidelines For Protecting Schools And Universities From Military Use During Armed Conflict. During times of violent conflict, schools are targets for attack or may be used for the recruitment of child soldiers. The buildings may also be appropriated for other uses, such as military barracks, weapons stores, and detention centers. Countries that sign the Safe Schools Declaration have made a public declaration that attacks on schools and the military use of schools are unacceptable.

Resolutions and recommendations from this panel

1. Parents have a key role in ensuring their children know and understand their culture
 2. Stimulate intersectoral climate action through research to visibility the impacts of Climate change on the nutritional status of children and women of reproductive age among vulnerable populations in EAC
 3. Advocate for adoption and implementation of the Safe Schools declaration in EAC partner states in line with the AU theme of the year of Education by promoting access to quality education for all.
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PREVALENCE OF NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES (NCDS) IN EAST AFRICA: THE URGENT NEED FOR REGIONAL REGULATION TO BAN PHOS AND LIMIT ITFAS TO ADDRESS CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

SPEAKERS ON THIS PANEL: DR. FREDIRICK L. MASHILI - MUHIMBILI UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH AND ALLIED SCIENCE, MS. MARY RICHARD - TAWLA, MR. YOSIA KIMWERI – TAWLA



The discussions on this panel explored ways in which regulations can help to eliminate industrially produced Trans Fat Acids as a measure to reduce cardiovascular diseases. The issue of prevalence of non-communicable diseases is key because of urbanization and poor eating and health habits. Additionally, liquid based oils are converted to solid fats like margarines, which include trans-fat acid and the PHOs have high amounts of TFA. This can result in insulin resistance which causes diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. Levels of TFA in solidified oils is higher than 2% which is recommended by WHO. We consume daily these products that have a substantial amount of TFA. There is a need for policies to control for ingredients that will regulate the amount of TFAs in food produced.

Resolutions and recommendations from this panel

1. We request the council to consider passing a regional regulation to limit the industrially produced Trans Fat Acids (iTFA) to not more than 2% in the food supply in East Africa so as to address Cardiovascular Disease in the Region.

HIGH-LEVEL VISIT TO EAC AND EALA



Link: <https://x.com/eacsof/status/1803430667080138878>

Summit participants had a unique opportunity to pay a high-level engagement visit to the EAC secretariat and EALA. At EALA, participants engaged with EALA representatives serving various committees including the GPC, accounts, and the youth caucus, and discussed how to bridge the gap between the community and her citizenry, Members shared the inspiration to bring the community closer to the people. They invited the CSO participants to invite EALA members to events they hold and committed to inviting CSO members to their own engagement spaces to promote the community's vision. The chair informed participants that all members of EALA would like to have the opportunity to have activities at the partner state level but are hindered by the limited resources allocated.



The assembly and the court are purely funded by partner state contributions and do not receive funding from donors meaning that matters they decide on are not influenced by donor priorities. Compared to the budgets of the partner states, the budget of the community is quite low at about 112 million USD to manage the affairs of the community.

He noted that the benefit that the governments get from interaction is more what citizens get. As citizens trade, they pay taxes, but often those taxes are not commiserated to taxes paid. He also encourages CSOs to explore local philanthropists to support the community. Partners financial contributions have not been consistent.

The chair urged CSO participants to advocate for partner states to allocate sufficient funding and achieve the aspirations of the forefathers who established the community. When the funding is insufficient then some activities like citizen engagement and sensitization are left out. There is limited autonomy at the EAC due to resources and centralised system that cripple the attainment of EAC integration.



On amendment of the treaty, the SG stated that there is a budgetary provision for a comprehensive review of the treaty. He encouraged CSOs to engage in this and reminded participants of the EACJ ruling that determined that if citizens were not consulted in the process of reviewing the treaty, they had a right to stop the process. The biggest challenge with the treaty review process is that it is time-consuming as decisions of the community are made by consensus.

The chair encouraged CSO participants to liaise with GPC committee or any members of EALA to sponsor private members Bills on critical issues for due consideration. Assent to Bills is a function of Summit and he encouraged CSOs to advocate for the Bills to be assented to by all partner states otherwise they wouldn't become law. There have been important Bills that have lost traction including gender bill that have not been assented to. The chair promised to give due consideration to the proposed CSO bill.

In reference to funding for the SG forum, the legislators have done their part in approving budgets for the same and it is up to the implementors. Finally, the chair reminded participants that Rule 86 allows any citizen, association, legal or natural persons of partner states to petition the assembly on matters that may affect them directly.



Resolutions and recommendations from this panel

1. EALA recognizes the importance of the partnership with the civil society
2. EALA urged CSOs to advocate within respective partner states on the timely submission of contributions to support the EAC HQ
3. CSOs should endeavor to engage in the process of review of the Treaty
4. CSOs should advocate for partner states to allocate sufficient resources to the community



CLOSING CEREMONY



The final day of the summit began with participants contributing their input towards a communique that detailed their asks and recommendations. The same was developed and shared for input prior to finalisation and submission to the EAC Council of Ministers the following week.

The official closing ceremony began with a lively presentation of traditional dance. Thereafter, Ms. Lillian Alex read through the draft communique and recommendations. This was followed by remarks from the development partners present who shared their support for CSO and the EAC to widen and deepen engagement for benefit of citizens. They commended the good and actionable recommendations to take forward the various agendas and asked that CSOs commit to working on the issues raised in the recommendations. EACCSOF, governing Council President, shared that civil society was pleased with the leadership of the EAC for their engagement throughout the summit and that we will continue the engagement and partnership. He committed further to working towards ensuring that the EAC keeps thriving and is a model institution in Africa





Amb. Mbudi as a representative of the government of the United Republic of Tanzania thanked the organizers for a successful summit, appreciated the delegates for their dedication insights. He further thanked development partners and sponsors for their support. He reminded participants that CSOs are not here to -

compete with or fight the government because both have a common goal to improve social economic wellbeing of our society. It is our duty to bring our people together; CSOs should be a bridge between the government and the people, society, and culture. CSOs have geographical reach, are trusted by the people and are asked to use these advantages to invest in empowering society. He reiterated that the outcome of this summit must have an impact to the society and community and appealed to EACSOF to submit recommendations to the EAC Secretary General, Speaker, and other actors to push implementation and copy to all partner states. He noted that the recommendations shared show objectivity and that CSOs know their role and implementing it well.



The guest of honour at the closing ceremony, Rt Hon Joseph Ntakirutimana the speaker for EALA noted with pleasure that this conference discussed important topics aiming at strategizing, and enhancing citizen participation and that the discussion was timely and essential towards building unified East Africa. Engaging citizens in the decision-making process, educating them about the benefits of regional integration, and empowering them to act on essential steps. He invited participants to carry the lessons learnt, and not get tired of collaborating with our government and RECs in implementing the lessons

Annexures:

Annex 1: Communique from the 2024 Summit.

We, the citizens of the East African Community Partner States–Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo–comprising civil society actors, media practitioners, legal practitioners, academia, youth, women, pastoralists, farmers, and elected representatives, convened in Arusha, Tanzania, from July 18th to 21st, 2024, for the second annual East African Civil Society Summit under the auspices of the East African Civil Society Forum (EACSOFF).

Our theme: *"Harnessing Citizens' Potential in Regional Integration Processes: Utilizing Technological Advancements to Address Climate Change Challenges and Ensure Food Security."*

The 2024 Summit gathered 200 CSO actors to chart a path toward harnessing the prosperity of our citizens in the region.

Acknowledgements:

- a) We acknowledge our unity and common aspirations for trade, development, and democracy, recognizing that our desired East Africa is attainable through meaningful participation.
- b) We recognize the achievements of the community over the past twenty-five years in uniting and integrating the East African region.

Resolutions:

Citizen Participation in Regional Integration

- a) Protect and enhance civic space for citizen participation in governance to strengthen the synergy between EAC Organs and civil society organizations.
- b) Promote meaningful, inclusive, and impactful engagement of civil society actors and citizens, in democracy and regional integration processes.
- c) Strengthen connections at the grassroots level to ensure continuity of work even when CSOs face challenges.
- d) Promote transparency and accountability within CSOs to attract and maintain consistent funding and enhance collaboration and coordination of interest groups.

Climate Change and Food Security

- a) Enhance our capacity to use research and data for climate awareness and sustainable agricultural production
- b) Promote the use of early warning systems to improve farming practices and ensure food security across the region.
- c) Support innovative, locally led initiatives for climate change adaptation and mitigation inspired by traditional knowledge.
- d) Harness the potential of evolving technology to support agricultural production.

Harnessing Technology for Democracy and Development

- a) Utilize digital spaces (e.g., social media) for engagement, enabling a broad spectrum of people to engage, coordinate, and mobilize.
- b) Promote and advocate for the implementation of the ICT protocol

Trade and Investment:

- a) Remove non-tariff barriers that constrain cross-border trade between East African Community member states.

Promoting and Protecting Electoral Democracy

- a) Commit to the universal ratification and domestication of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance without further delay.
- b) Ensure all member states provide the East African Court of Justice with explicit human rights jurisdiction as required under Article 27(2) of the EAC Treaty.
- c) Commit to the universal ratification and domestication of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance without further delay.

Promoting and Protecting Traditional Culture and Knowledge

- a) Protect and promote positive cultural and traditional knowledge and practices, ensuring that beneficial cultural norms are maintained.
- b) Promote regional cultural festivals and establish institutions to protect our culture
- c) Promote intergenerational exchanges to enhance understanding of our culture

Youth Participation in Regional Integration

- a) Harness opportunities for young people to drive innovation in regional integration efforts.
- b) Protect youth from profiling and alienation from national and regional development processes.

Health

- a) Commit to improving health services and accessibility across the region.

Calls to Action:

EAC Recommendations:

- a) Revitalize the Annual Secretary General's Forum and Regional Dialogue Committee.
- b) Allocate adequate budgets to finance civil society engagement and the Consultative Dialogue framework.
- c) Use the AU Model Law on the Protection of Cultural Property and Heritage to draft a regional traditional culture Bill.
- d) Urgently address current challenges and barriers to trade, including Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) and the negotiation of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).
- e) Revise Article 119 (c) of the EAC Treaty to promote trade in cultural goods and services.
- f) Maintain consistent channels for dialogue with civil society on democratic governance.
- g) Embrace digital platforms for public participation and information dissemination.

National Governments:

- a) Resource EAC organs adequately and prioritize citizen engagement.
- b) Promote digital literacy and enforce cybersecurity policies
- c) Advance a rights-respecting digital ecosystem and robust data protection regulations.
- d) Recognize the role of culture and traditional knowledge, promoting intangible knowledge preservation.
- e) Commit to the ratification and domestication of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance.
- f) Embrace technology to improve electoral and democratic processes.
- g) Fulfil financial commitments to the East African Community.
- h) Implement inclusive education and accessible SRH services, advocating for holistic approaches.
- i) Develop and implement an EAC draft Protocol on Good Governance.

EACSOF:

- a) To monitor the status of civic space and develop activity and implementation trackers.
- b) Establish awards recognizing excellence in citizen engagement in the region
- c) Advocate for the development of a CSO Bill.
- d) Track and evaluate the implementation of summit recommendations.

Citizens and NGOs:

- a) Design programs to improve digital literacy, promote online safety and combat digital vices.
- b) Advocate for digital rights policies addressing the ethical use of AI and emerging technologies.
- c) Advocate for stronger legal protections of civic liberties
- d) Utilize digital technology for civic engagement and service delivery.
- e) Raise awareness on climate change and adaptation to the citizens in the language they understand.
- f) Engage in the promotion of positive aspects of culture
- g) Build coalitions and diversify resource bases.

Development Partners:

- a) Continue support for regional integration and development initiatives.
- b) Support engagement and participation of CSOS in the annual CSO summit

This communique reflects our collective commitment to strengthening trade, development, and democracy in East Africa. We call upon all stakeholders to act on these resolutions for the prosperity and unity of our region.

Annex 2: Video highlights of the 2024 EA CSO summit

- [Watch Day 1 East Africa Civil Society Summit 2024](#)
- [Watch Day 2 & 3 East Africa Civil Society Summit 2024](#)
- [Watch Documentary of East Africa Civil Society Summit 2024](#)

Annex 3: Photos from the 2024 EA CSO summit

- [The East African Civil Society Summit 2024 Day 1 Images](#)
- [The East African Civil Society Summit 2024 Day 2 Images](#)
- [The East African Civil Society Summit 2024 Day 3 Images](#)

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