



[Communiqué of the East African Civil Society Summit 2025](#)

Theme: Harnessing EAC Citizens' Potential and Participation in Regional Integration Processes

Sub-themes:

- Day One: Innovation for Regional Integration – Advancing Governance, Economic Growth and Social Inclusion in the Digital Age
- Day Two: Regional Integration, Social Inclusion, and Resilience

Venue: Mövenpick Hotel, Nairobi

Dates: 29–30 September 2025

1. Introduction

The East African Civil Society Summit 2025 convened over 200 delegates from all eight Partner States, including the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia, together with representatives of governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, and development partners. The Summit was officially opened by Dr. Caroline W. Karangu (PhD), Principal Secretary for the East African Community in Kenya, represented by Ms. Mary Maisori, who emphasised that integration is a shared responsibility. Over two days, participants assessed progress and challenges in regional integration through a citizen-centred lens. Key concerns included persistent non-tariff barriers undermining the Common Market, uneven digital transformation, and shrinking civic and media space. Delegates underscored that integration will remain fragile unless Partner States harmonise digital governance, dismantle NTBs, safeguard civic freedoms, and institutionalise citizen participation under Articles 6(d), 121, and 127 of the EAC Treaty.

2. Overview of Deliberations

Deliberations highlighted corruption and illicit financial flows as entrenched threats draining billions annually, with weak asset recovery and whistleblower protections undermining accountability. Border disputes and fragile peace persist due to poor ratification of cross-border frameworks, leaving borderland communities marginalised. Extractive industries were identified as a sector where host communities face displacement and exploitation while benefit-sharing agreements remain unfulfilled. The Summit also focused on inclusion: youth were recognised as drivers of digital activism and electoral reform but continue to face structural barriers; women professionals raised concerns about stereotypes, unequal pay, and limited leadership in STEM fields; adolescents advocating for sexual and reproductive health rights exposed systemic neglect, underfunding, and discriminatory laws. Delegates concluded that integration cannot advance without transparency in resource governance, effective enforcement of anti-corruption frameworks, protection of civic and media freedoms, and the meaningful participation of youth, women, and marginalised groups in governance, trade, and development processes.

3. Strategic Highlights from Deliberations

(a) Trade and Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs): Delegates consistently underlined that NTBs remain the heaviest burden on the Common Market, despite commitments under the EAC Common Market Protocol. These barriers inflate costs, obstruct small and informal enterprises, and weaken public trust in integration. Participants stressed that dismantling NTBs is a political and economic imperative, without which the promise of a single regional market cannot be realised.

(b) Digital Transformation and Governance: Discussions affirmed that digitalisation is reshaping trade, health, education, and governance, but progress is fragmented. Broadband gaps, weak data infrastructure, and limited interoperability of systems risk leaving many behind. Surveillance, misinformation, and cybercrime were flagged as rising threats. Delegates called for harmonised regional digital laws aligned to continental frameworks, expanded broadband investment, and inclusive digital governance that protects rights and ensures accountability.

(c) Civic Space, Human Rights, and Democratic Participation: Civic and political freedoms were highlighted as essential for credible integration but remain under threat. Restrictive laws, shrinking space for media, surveillance, and cross-border renditions undermine democratic participation and accountability. Election observation faces arbitrary restrictions, while harassment of journalists and human rights defenders persists. Delegates stressed that freedom of expression, assembly, and participation must be guaranteed if the EAC is to remain a people-centred Community.

(d) Cross-Border Peace and Security: Unresolved disputes and fragile peace along borders continue to marginalise communities and fuel insecurity. Lack of ratification and enforcement of continental and regional frameworks weakens conflict management. Participants emphasised the need for strong early warning mechanisms, inclusive peacebuilding that involves borderland citizens, and recognition of local governments and CSOs as vital actors in sustaining regional stability.

(e) Corruption and Illicit Financial Flows: Entrenched corruption and unchecked illicit financial flows remain a serious obstacle to development. Billions of dollars are lost annually, depriving citizens of essential services and weakening public institutions. Asset recovery remains inconsistent, procurement systems remain opaque, and whistleblowers are inadequately protected. Delegates underscored that laws already in place must be enforced with political courage and that recovered resources must be directed transparently to development priorities.

(f) Extractive Industries and Natural Resource Governance: Natural resource governance was identified as an area of deep concern. Communities in extractive zones face displacement, pollution, and exploitation while benefit-sharing agreements remain largely unimplemented. Delegates noted that resources should be managed with transparency and aligned to the Africa Mining Vision, ensuring host communities receive tangible benefits. Attention was also drawn to environmental sustainability and the need for safeguards that protect biodiversity and livelihoods.

(g) Youth, Women, and Inclusion: Youth were recognised as critical actors in democratic processes, moving from digital activism to grassroots mobilisation, election monitoring, and reform advocacy. Yet they face barriers such as voter apathy, legal constraints, and exclusion of youth with disabilities. Women professionals highlighted ongoing gender stereotypes, unequal pay, limited leadership, and barriers in STEM careers. Adolescents and young advocates for SRHR drew attention to stigma, restrictive policies, and underfunding that deny access to health services. Delegates reaffirmed that inclusive policies, dedicated budget lines, and disability-sensitive measures are required to enable the participation of youth, women, and other marginalised groups in governance and integration.

(h) Persons with Disabilities: Discussions highlighted key barriers and solutions related to enhancing quality and access to health commodities for persons with disabilities. It emphasizes the importance of involving individuals with disabilities in technology development, addressing various challenges they face, upskilling service providers. Delegates reaffirmed that inclusive policies, dedicated budget lines, and disability-sensitive measures are required to enable the participation of youth, women, and other marginalised groups in governance and integration.

3. Validation of Tools and Evidence

The Summit confirmed a set of instruments that strengthen accountability and embed civil society in the regional integration process. Delegates formally validated three tools developed under the LIFTED Project with support from the European Union and GIZ:

(a) EAC Gender and Youth Compliance Barometer (2020–2024): An independent accountability mechanism for tracking progress, identifying gaps, and documenting Partner States’ performance against their gender equality and youth empowerment commitments.

(b) CSO Engagement Toolkit: A practical guide providing structured approaches for civil society, women’s organisations, and youth networks to engage effectively in EAC processes. It includes advocacy strategies on trade and alignment with the African Continental Free Trade Area.

(c) Guiding Principles for CSO Engagement in the EAC: A normative framework establishing minimum standards for transparent, inclusive, and accountable civil society participation across the Community.

Together, these tools were recognised as milestones in operationalising the Consultative Dialogue Framework under Articles 127–129 of the EAC Treaty, and delegates called on the EAC Council of Ministers and the Secretariat to integrate them formally into decision-making processes.

In addition, the Summit endorsed several evidence frameworks presented through plenary discussions. These included studies assessing implementation of the AU Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, findings from the Africa Mining Vision on extractive governance and benefit sharing, and regional surveys on election observation such as *Eyes on the Ballot* and the AHEAD initiative. Delegates agreed that these resources provide critical data for evidence-based advocacy, highlight persistent governance and accountability gaps, and reinforce the call to protect citizen observers as human rights defenders.

5. Call for Action

(a) Governments and EAC Institutions

- Delegates and participants call on Partner States to ratify and implement regional conventions on cross-border cooperation and to establish effective early warning and rapid response systems that prevent recurring instability in border communities.
- Delegates and participants demand enforcement of anti-corruption laws with genuine political will, strengthening of asset recovery frameworks, and transparent use of recovered assets for essential public services.
- Delegates and participants urge governments to repeal restrictive laws that shrink civic and media space, enact legal safeguards for human rights defenders and journalists, and institutionalise election observation as a democratic safeguard.

- Delegates and participants insist on the recognition of citizen election observers as human rights defenders, with transparent, digital, and decentralised accreditation, and the formal integration of their recommendations into post-election reforms.
- Delegates and participants call for reforms in extractive governance by aligning laws with the Africa Mining Vision, ensuring transparent contracts, and embedding enforceable benefit-sharing provisions that guarantee host communities a fair return from natural resources.
- Delegates and participants reaffirm that the participation of youth, women, and adolescents must be institutionalised in electoral, policy, and budgetary processes, with disability inclusion mainstreamed across all governance frameworks.
- Delegates emphasized the need for inclusive practices, improved data collection and dissemination, enhanced policy alignment, capacity building of health service providers, and direct involvement of people with disabilities in all aspects of SRH and access to health commodities.

(b) Development Partners

- Delegates and participants urge development partners to expand support for peacebuilding and cross-border cooperation by investing in sustainable local peace infrastructures.
- Delegates and participants call for predictable, flexible, and long-term funding for civil society organisations, particularly grassroots actors, and for financial flows to be rebalanced so that local CSOs receive fair and sustainable support.
- Delegates and participants recommend stronger technical assistance and capacity-building for asset recovery, financial transparency, and oversight of the extractive sector, alongside support for regional cooperation against illicit financial flows.

- Delegates and participants emphasise the need for investment in civic-tech and youth-led innovations that strengthen election monitoring, combat misinformation, improve digital literacy, and expand access to inclusive SRHR information.
- Delegates and participants call for this Summit to be recognised as a strategic accountability platform, with annual investment guaranteed to sustain its continuity and impact.

(c) Civil Society Organisations

- Delegates and participants commit to strengthening cross-border coalitions to confront corruption, defend freedoms, and monitor extractive industries while deepening regional solidarity.
- Delegates and participants agree to use validated tools and regional research to drive evidence-based advocacy and ensure governments and EAC organs act on citizen-driven recommendations.
- Delegates and participants pledge to amplify the voices of youth, women, and marginalised groups to secure their meaningful inclusion in governance and accountability processes.
- Delegates and participants commit to protecting election observers and grassroots civic actors through regional solidarity mechanisms, peer protection networks, and litigation where rights are infringed.
- Delegates and participants resolve to tailor civic education into youth-friendly formats and local languages so that grassroots communities fully understand and engage in regional integration processes.

6. Closing Resolution

The East African Civil Society Summit 2025 reaffirms that integration cannot endure without transparency, accountability, and inclusion. Peace must be secured across borders, corruption must be confronted with political courage, civic and media freedoms must be guaranteed, natural resources must serve communities, and citizens must be recognised as the foundation of legitimacy.

The call from civil society is clear: *“integration in East Africa will only succeed when it is owned and driven by its people. The pain of one citizen is the pain of all, and the progress of one Partner State is the progress of the entire Community.”*