

AfDB Civil Society Working Group

Newsletter | October 2024



Members of the AfDB CSOs Working Group at the AfDB Annual Meetings in Kenya (May 2024).

Chief Editor's note

Dear readers,

Welcome to the first edition of the quarterly African Development Bank (AfDB) CSO Working Group newsletter. With this publication, we want to share our activities and commitments with communities and civil society groups across Africa and beyond, as well as with key decision-makers.

The **AfDB CSO Working Group** convenes more than 70 civil society organizations (CSOs) from across Africa and beyond. Together, we work to foster accountability and responsible investments in international development finance while championing the interests of communities impacted by development projects.

Our primary mission is to monitor the AfDB's activities, policies, and projects to promote inclusion, effective stakeholder engagement, free and timely access to information, environmental sustainability, accountability, and transparency. These efforts are geared towards enhancing project performance and outcomes, while preventing adverse impacts in our countries.

Historically, our group has been at the forefront of dialogues with AfDB Management and Executive Directors to strengthen environmental and social safeguards and enhance the Bank's accountability processes. Our engagement in review processes such as the Independent Recourse Mechanism (IRM), Integrated Safeguard System (ISS), Disclosure and Access to Information Policy, as well as energy policy and strategy reviews, has been instrumental.

With this newsletter, we will keep you informed about the latest developments, major events, case studies, and stories from communities affected by AfDB-financed projects. We invite you to stay engaged, share this publication with your networks, and actively participate in our initiatives.

Sign up to the newsletter

We thank you for your continued support and hope this newsletter will serve as a valuable tool to strengthen our collective efforts.

Sincerely,
Aly Marie Sagne

Director, Lumière Synergie pour le Développement
Chief Editor, AfDB CSO Working Group Newsletter

The AfDB CSOs Working Group at the AfDB Annual Meetings

On May 29, the AfDB kicked off the opening ceremony of its Annual Meetings in Nairobi, Kenya. About 5,000 delegates, including many representatives of the AfDB CSOs Working Group, attended the event.

Through in-person meetings and an online campaign, civil society called on the AfDB to:

- strengthen opportunities for civil society's and communities' participation in the Bank activities;
- prioritize community-led development and human rights-based approaches;
- ensure a socially just energy transition and promote projects that truly benefit peoples and the planet;
- allocate more resources to implement the updated safeguards;
- better engage with persons with disabilities and address their needs
- strengthen the standards to prevent and address gender-based violence;
- constructively respond to cases filed to the Independent Recourse Mechanism.

However, not all the members of the AfDB CSOs Working Group were allowed to join the Annual Meetings. About 15 people faced security threats and were denied entry, simply because they were wearing t-shirts with some slogans.

"They were asking us: who are you? Why are you wearing these kinds of t-shirts? Do you know it's not allowed under Kenyan law? Are you making a demonstration?", says Aly Marie Sagne, Executive Director of the Senegalese NGO Lumiere Synergie pour le Developpement.



Members of the AfDB CSOs Working Group at the AfDB Annual Meetings in Kenya (May 2024).

What do we want?



a life with dignity: homes, food, water, public health & education.



access to renewable energy & a just energy transition



respect for human rights



transparency, accountability, and access to information



spaces for safe and meaningful participation

Ahead of the Annual Meetings, around 40 members of the AfDB CSO Working Group had joined a two-day workshop, to discuss joint advocacy strategies for engaging the Bank's board and management. Some staff members from the Bank and the Independent Recourse Mechanism, who joined the CSOs workshop, expressed interest in working more closely with civil society. However, the expulsion of civil society representatives from the Annual Meetings clearly shows that there is still a long way to go to ensure meaningful participation.

Read more:



- ["Civil society's key demands to the African Development Bank"](#)
- ["You're not allowed here: my first time at the African Development Bank's Annual Meetings"](#) [Blog by the Africa Regional Coordinator at the Coalition for Human Rights in Development, Ony Soa Ratsifandrihamanana]
- ["Civil society groups expelled from AfDB Annual Meetings"](#)

Watch

In this [series of short interviews](#), members of the AfDB Working Group share messages to the Bank.

Independent Accountability Mechanisms meeting in Nairobi



On July 9, a group of representatives from 13 Independent Accountability Mechanisms (IAMs) came together for a two-day outreach workshop in Nairobi (Kenya), co-organized by the International Accountability Project (IAP), one of the members of the AfDB CSOs Working Group.

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the roles and activities of the IAMs with a group of civil society organizations (CSOs) and share information about their institutions, objectives, and functions. They also discussed how communities (and individual complainants for some IAMs) impacted by development projects financed by development banks can access these mechanisms and file complaints, in case their rights are violated.

The in-person workshop, with the first day held in a hybrid format, was attended by more than 30 CSOs from Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

The workshop included sessions organized and facilitated by CSOs for the learning purpose of the IAMs. These included CSOs' experiences on engaging the IAMs to pursue remedy for project-affected communities, gender perspectives on accessing remedy, and the use of judicial versus non-judicial mechanisms. There were also interactive and engaging discussions between the CSOs and the IAMs.

[**Read more in this blog by Elias Jika \(IAP\)**](#)

UNDERSTANDING THE AFDB IN 100 WORDS

Since 1964, the AfDB Group has been funding projects in the public and private sectors across Africa. It has supported poverty-reduction and livelihoods programmes, but also polluting coal plants or fertilizer factories.

Why should you know about the AfDB?

- the AfDB is one of the most powerful institutions in Africa: it mobilizes billions of dollars every year;
- it funds projects and shapes policies that, indirectly or indirectly, impact all our lives;
- it is a public institution, that should serve the interests of African people;
- it has promised to respect human rights, but often its projects harm people and the planet.

[**Download the toolkit for CSOs "Understanding the AfDB"**](#)

Strengthening Accountability and Human Rights: Civil Society Dialogue with the African Development Bank's Independent Mechanism

On June 24-25, Lumière Synergie pour le Développement (LSD) co-organized a hybrid dialogue on AfDB's accountability policies, to empower communities, human rights defenders and CSOs in West and Central Africa to use the AfDB's Independent Recourse Mechanism (IRM). During the workshop, there were sessions on what is the IRM, how it operates, and the importance of addressing risks of reprisals that communities and CSOs engaging with the Bank might face.

Protecting and promoting human rights is essential for sustainable and inclusive development. However, despite the good intentions of its promoters and financiers, development projects do not always go according to plan. This is why it is crucial that those most affected can have their say and hold the bank accountable in case of harm.

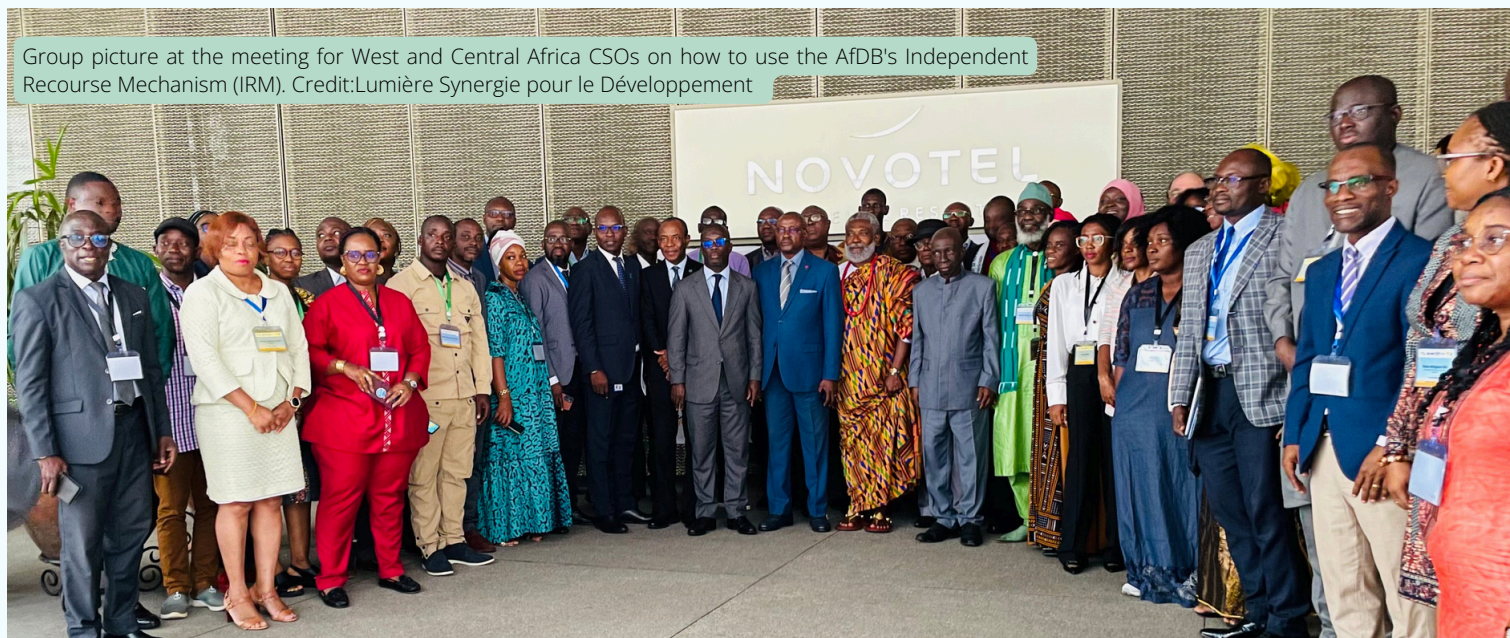
Accountability mechanisms can play a crucial role in preventing abuses of power, ensuring transparency and fairness, and protecting human rights. However, their effectiveness depends on a dynamic and positive commitment from civil society. Integrating human rights and accountability tools into development interventions is not just a theoretical concept, but a practical approach that can bring significant benefits. It ensures inclusive, responsive and sustainable projects, while holding individuals, institutions and companies accountable for the impacts of their activities.

The workshop brought together the AfDB's IRM, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Réseau des Plateformes d'ONG d'Afrique de l'Ouest (REPAOC) and the Convention de la Société Civile Ivoirienne (CSCI). To ensure community's representation, LSD also facilitated the participation of community members from Côte d'Ivoire affected by the AfDB-funded Atinkou thermal power plant and the Singrobo/Ahouaty hydroelectric dam.

At the end of the 2-day workshop, civil society formulated a series of recommendations for the IRM and CSOs who are monitoring AfDB-funded projects:

- Popularize and visibilize the work of the IRM, including among community leaders, media professionals and schools (e.g.: through the production of videos about the IRM);
- Promote access to the IRM for all communities at the national level, as communities often do not have the means or knowledge to access it without the support of NGOs.
- Raise awareness among affected communities about their social, economic and environmental rights;
- Prioritize direct communication with communities, using safe channels of communications.

Group picture at the meeting for West and Central Africa CSOs on how to use the AfDB's Independent Recourse Mechanism (IRM). Credit: Lumière Synergie pour le Développement



Community agency in the face of dispossession: the experience of the Paten community in Uganda



The IRM team meeting holding a discussion with the leaders and members of Paten Clan.. Credit: IAP

After over a year of attempts to engage with the project implementers, in October 2021 the Paten Clan in Uganda filed a [complaint](#) with the Independent Recourse Mechanism (IRM) of the AfDB, reporting serious human rights violations arising from the implementation of the Wadelai Irrigation Scheme in the Pakwach District. In the complaint - filed with the support of Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability (UCCA) - the Paten Clan highlighted the forceful acquisition of their community land and the assaults on clan members, who were reportedly shot and wounded by security forces upon resisting the forceful takeover of their land.

Initially, the Paten Clan consented to offering 365 acres of their land to the project; however, the project implementer (Coil Limited) then was assigned 365 hectares (corresponding to 901 acres) for the project.

About the project

The Wadelai Irrigation Scheme is one of the four irrigation schemes under the AfDB “Farm Income Enhancement and Forestry Conservation Project” (FIEFOC-2). The project intends to improve household incomes, food security, and climate resilience through sustainable natural resources management and agricultural enterprise development. It is co-financed by the Nordic Development Fund and the Government of Uganda.

It is intended to benefit 31,000 households, create about 1,000 alternative livelihood opportunities and equip 1,400 people with business skills.

Attacks on Human Rights Defenders

When they expressed concerns about the project, nine Paten Clan leaders were arrested and jailed on allegations they were sabotaging the project and threatening violence. Two civil servants from the same community were prevented from returning to their jobs by the Pakwach Chief Administrative Officer.

On 10 August 2021, when the community tried to resist the forceful entry onto their land by the project’s construction company, police and army officers from the Uganda People’s Defense Forces reportedly shot at 16 community members.

Also civil society organizations supporting the Paten community were targeted. In the summer of 2021, the officials from the Pakwach District Local Government revoked the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Ugandan organization Buliisa Initiative for Rural Development organization (BIRUDO) and suspended the organization’s operations in Pakwach District pending investigation.

Advocacy with the Financiers

Following these attacks against the community, some members of the AfDB CSOs Working Group (International Accountability Project and the Coalition on Human Rights in Development) supported the community facilitating connections with partners who provided security support (Front Line Defenders) and conducted different advocacy activities (e.g.: with the US Treasury Department and the project's financiers).

When the AfDB management dismissed the community's concerns, the community decided to file a complaint. The IRM investigated 3 areas:

- 1) consent of the affected community to the use of community land for the project;
- 2) meaningful stakeholder's engagements and retaliation against community members;
- 3) impacts on livelihood and lack of compensation.

In its compliance report, released in July 2023, the IRM noted the AfDB did not comply with its Operational Safeguards 1 and 2 (respectively, on environmental and social assessment and on involuntary resettlement). The report confirmed the Bank failed to: conduct due diligence and to develop a Resettlement Action Plan when there was a change in the project design; to conduct proper socio-economic assessment and provide adequate compensation; and to supervise the community consultations, that as a result were not open, accessible, sensitive, inclusive, and free from external interference.

After receiving the report, the Bank developed a Management Action Plan, to remedy the harm caused during project implementation.

Way forward

The different interventions shaped the discourse on the centrality of traditional leadership in the administration of Paten land and emphasized the power of the clan leader and Council of Elders in steering development in the Paten community. There is hope within the community that the recommendations provided by the IRM will help addressing the current project impasse.



Members of the Paten community marching through the Wadelai Irrigation project area

- **Blog: After attacks, a community in Uganda unites to fight for their land** (by John Mwebe | IAP - April 2022)
- **Heard at last: Project suspended for a community in Uganda to negotiate with government and investors** (by John Mwebe | IAP - January 2024)

AfDB updates: a new director for the IRM

The AfDB's Independent Recourse Mechanism (IRM) is the institution's independent accountability mechanism (IAM) and receives complaints about environmental and human rights harms from project-affected communities. On September 1, 2024, the director of the IRM, David Simpson, resigned after 3 years of service in the role. Outreach and ongoing stakeholder engagement is crucial for an effective IAM, and the AfDB CSOs working group sent Simpson a [letter of appreciation](#) in August 2024 to recognize his efforts to ensure that African CSOs know that the IRM exists and understand how to use it.

The AfDB is currently hiring a new IRM director, and the Working Group sent a [letter](#) to the AfDB Board to ensure that the selection committee includes civil society members, and the selection criteria include qualifications for an effective IAM director. These criteria include expertise in human rights and the ability to address power imbalances among parties. We hope to see the IRM continue to grow in its capacity to be a community-centered channel for justice and an effective governance tool for the AfDB.

Letter of Appreciation to David Simpson

Portrait of the month

At the 2024 Annual Meetings of the AfDB, Babacar Diouf, a project monitoring specialist for AfDB-financed projects at Lumière Synergie pour le Développement (LSD) – a member of the AfDB Working Group – was honored by the AfDB's Independent Recourse Mechanism (IRM) for his exemplary commitment to social accountability. Since LSD's creation in 2010, Babacar has been monitoring projects funded by international financial institutions in Senegal, with a particular focus on AfDB projects. His most notable contributions include his work with two communities affected by the Malicounda dual-fuel power plant project and Phase 1 of the Dakar Regional Express Train (TER) project. Thanks to his efforts, these communities were able to access the IRM to seek redress for the harm they had suffered. Babacar not only facilitated these communities' access to the IRM but also served as an advisor, helping them navigate the complex complaint-handling processes. His direct involvement has enhanced accountability in AfDB projects, ensuring that the voices of affected populations are heard and considered.



However, this work also exposed him to retaliation. In October 2022, he was detained for a week along with 24 members of the impacted communities from Phase 2 of the TER project in Sébikotane. Upon receiving the award, Babacar expressed his gratitude, saying: *"This award is a tremendous source of motivation to continue our commitment to communities. I dedicate this award to my colleagues at LSD, as well as the men and women who bravely defend the rights of communities when they are violated by development projects that are supposed to benefit them."*

The AfDB Working Group congratulates Babacar for this well-deserved award, which underscores the critical importance of accountability and respect for human rights in sustainable development.

[Read more](#)

What's next

OCTOBER

Oct 25-27: World Bank & IMF Annual Meetings

NOVEMBER

Nov 2: Int'l Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists

Nov 11-24: COP29 (Azerbaijan)

Nov 25-27: [UN Forum on Business and Human Rights](#) (Geneva)

Nov 29: UN Day of Solidarity with the Palestinians and Women Human Rights Defenders Day

DECEMBER

Dec 9: Human Rights Defenders Day

Dec 10: Human Rights Day



Useful resources

- [CSOs toolkit about the AfDB](#) (by the AfDB CSOs working group)
- [Anti-retaliation toolkit](#) (by the AfDB IRM)
- [A guide to IAMs](#) (by UCCA)

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