

AfDB Civil Society Working Group

Newsletter | May 2025



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

About the AfDB Working Group

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

*We are united by a shared belief: development projects must be fair, inclusive, transparent, and **genuinely benefit local communities**.*

We closely monitor AfDB's projects and policies—because behind large infrastructure and multimillion-dollar projects are human lives, rights, land, and ecosystems. We raise questions, we sound the alarm when necessary, and we propose alternatives.

Our goal is to ensure that people's voices are heard, that projects are designed with communities—not just for them—and that accountability is more than a buzzword. It must be a practice.

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.

In this issue:

- Finance in Common Summit 2025
- Mission 300 and the energy summit
- AfDB Independent Recourse Mechanism (IRM) Review Commencing Soon
- The IRM in 100 words
- Portrait: Veronique Mbole (GDA, Cameroon)
- Updates, resources and calendar

We invite you to stay engaged, share this publication with your networks, and actively participate in our initiatives.



[Sign up to the newsletter](#)

Members of the AfDB CSOs Working Group join the Finance in Common Summit

On February 26-28, hundreds of representatives of public development banks – as well as delegates from the private sector, governments, think tanks, academia and civil society – gathered in Cape Town, South Africa, for the 5th edition of the **Finance in Common Summit (FICS)**. This year the Summit – under the theme of “Fostering Infrastructure and Finance for Just and Sustainable Growth” – was co-hosted by the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).



Those with power and money are strategizing among themselves on how they should tackle issues such as the just energy transition, without even mentioning communities. They are not even thinking what a just energy transition could look like for communities and how communities can get involved in these discussions”, said Busisiwe Kamolane-Kgadima, Deputy Director at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (South Africa).

During the Summit, development banks - including the AfDB - talked about how to accelerate growth, mobilize private capital, and promote new financial mechanisms, throwing around plenty of buzzwords such as “sustainable”, “green”, and “just”. But once again, they failed to include in these conversations the **people who are most affected by their projects and policies**, and who have a better understanding of what “sustainable”, “green”, and “just” should look like in practice.



“Some of us have travelled very far to come here,” says Agnes Koilel, a Masai indigenous activist from Kenya and member of the local organization Narasha Development Community, whose community is affected by the AfDB-funded Olkaria geothermal projects. “We were disappointed to see that all these sessions were just presentations, where development banks were only talking to themselves, with no opportunities for us to raise questions and share our point of view”.

Members of the AfDB CSOs Working Group, however, did try to make their voices heard and shared their demands during two sessions:

- **“Why community led and locally owned development is key”**, co-organized with Forus and other CSOs, with the participation of **Fama Sarr** (community activist and leader of a women fishing processors organization in Senegal, who works closely with Lumière Synergie pour le Développement). Full recording [here](#).
- **“Impact Talk: Financing the Future: Why Community Engagement is the Key to Sustainable Development”**, with **Reitumetse Nkoti Mabula** (Executive Director, Seinoli Legal Trust), who shared about a problematic hydroelectric project., the Lesotho Highlands Water Project.



Read more and watch a series of videos in this multimedia report



Energy Summit and Mission 300

Energy access in Africa remains a major challenge, with approximately 43% of Africans still lacking electricity. The lack of clean, affordable energy hampers education, healthcare, agriculture, and economic development, as communities continue to struggle to meet basic energy needs.

In January 2025, the AfDB hosted the regional summit of **Mission 300** in Dar es Salaam. Co-led by the AfDB and the World Bank, Mission 300 is an initiative aimed at connecting 300 million Africans to electricity by 2030, through grid expansion, mini-grids, and standalone solar systems. At the Summit, African government leaders endorsed the **Dar es Salaam Energy Declaration**, which affirms their joint commitment to advance critical reforms and actions across the energy sector to increase access to electricity and clean cooking, increase the share of renewable energy, and increase private capital mobilization. While these commitments are necessary and ambitious, civil society groups have raised substantial concerns.

Mission 300 relies on massive private financing in a context of rising public debt and investor skepticism, and it overlooks structural problems such as access inequalities, outdated infrastructure, marginalization of some communities, and the invisibility of women.

The AfDB CSOs working group has presented these key recommendations in a joint statement

1) Meaningful Engagement of Civil Society

Organizations: *To ensure transparency, inclusivity, and accountability, AfDB must establish a continuous civil society consultation platform across the target countries currently developing the Country Energy Compacts.*

2) Phase Out Fossil Fuels:

The Mission 300 initiative does not prioritize fossil fuels within the specific Country Compacts, leaving this critical element at the discretion of individual countries. We urge the Bank to lead in ruling out fossil fuel investments and champion increased investment in decentralized renewable energy solutions, which guarantees diverse and significant job opportunities for the 70% of sub-Saharan Africans under the age of 30.

3) Prioritize Non-Debt Financing Mechanisms:

Given that many African countries are struggling with debt servicing, which limits investment in renewable energy solutions, Mission 300 has prioritized concessional loans and private sector guarantees as key financing mechanisms. We encourage AfDB to consider non-debt financing mechanisms to avoid further indebting countries.



[Check out the full statement of the AfDB CSOs Working Group ahead of the Energy Summit](#)



Credit: African Development Bank

Lumière Synergie pour le Développement and Bank Information Center advocacy meetings with Executive Directors and the AfDB Independent Recourse Mechanism

Since 2018, we have observed a **lack of dedicated engagement spaces for civil society organizations (CSOs)** within the framework of the AfDB Annual Meetings.

While we acknowledge the Bank's efforts in organizing separate continental and regional CSO forums, these forums often resemble partnership meetings rather than platforms for meaningful and critical dialogue with the Bank's decision-makers, including the Executive Directors.

Meanwhile, civil society representatives frequently face **retaliation and security risks** when engaging with the AfDB. For example, during last year's Annual Meetings in Nairobi, approximately 15 civil society representatives from the AfDB CSOs Working Group were prevented from attending the opening ceremony. Kenyan state security forces harassed them, confiscated their badges, and expelled them from the venue.

Given that Executive Directors (EDs) play a central role in the AfDB's decision-making processes, we believe **meaningful engagement with civil society is essential** to bridge communication gaps, share community concerns, foster mutual understanding, and explore avenues for collaboration. This approach aligns with the objectives outlined in the new AfDB CSO Engagement Action Plan (2024–2028).



In November 2024, Lumière Synergie pour le Développement (LSD) and Bank Information Center (BIC), visited the AfDB Headquarters in Abidjan and held several meetings with EDs' offices. LSD and BIC raised a number of issues, including **challenges and opportunities in AfDB-CSO engagement**, child sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH) cases, occupational health and safety (OHS) concerns in AfDB-funded projects, and examples of good practices—such as the Gambia RVCTP project, where collaboration with civil society improved overall project implementation.

Additionally, LSD presented the **Malicounda power plant case**, in which 12 project-affected community members reached an agreement in December 2023 through a constructive mediation process facilitated by the Independent Recourse Mechanism (IRM).

Discussions also addressed how AfDB management can more effectively respond to IRM advisory notes, including by participating in their launch events, and the role of EDs in preventing and responding to community complaints.

BIC provided updates on projects monitored by its partners (e.g. in Liberia, Kenya, and Ivory Coast) and shared a checklist on SEAH to support EDs in initiating conversations and raising critical questions about child SEAH in AfDB-funded projects.

As a result of these advocacy meetings, it was agreed to convene the first-ever AfDB Executive Directors/Management–CSO Town Hall in 2025 to foster deeper engagement between EDs and civil society.

AfDB Independent Recourse Mechanism Review Commencing Soon

Per its policy, the AfDB's independent accountability mechanism, the Independent Recourse Mechanism (IRM) is due to be reviewed every four years, and **the Bank is due to formally launch the review soon**. We call on the AfDB to ensure an **inclusive and transparent review process** that strengthens the IRM and the AfDB's commitment to accountability and remedy.

The review process should prioritize engaging with civil society organisations and local communities, particularly those who have used the IRM previously and can provide feedback on what's working with the mechanism and how the IRM can improve on outreach and case processing. This should include in-person and hybrid consultation meetings, held in multiple languages.



Credit: African Development Bank

The AfDB should publish all documents relevant to the review, including external review reports and proposed revisions to the policies. Stakeholders should have multiple opportunities to comment on these documents, and a matrix should be published that responds to each recommendation.

In 2021, the AfDB Board of Directors approved sweeping changes to the IRM that addressed several areas in which the mechanism's policy was inconsistent with standard practice at other independent accountability mechanisms and strengthened its accessibility, legitimacy, transparency, and effectiveness.

As the AfDB launches the review of the IRM in 2025, there must be a commitment to no regression or no dilution of the IRM policy, and the new policy should build upon the improvements passed in 2021.

Recommended changes include allowing more flexibility in the sequencing of compliance review and problem solving and removing barriers to accessing the mechanism. Importantly, this review should result in a stronger commitment to remedy from the AfDB, including a commitment to develop a remedial action framework, building off of recent developments at the International Finance Corporation.

UNDERSTANDING THE IRM IN 100 WORDS

The **Independent Recourse Mechanism (IRM)** was established in 2004 to ensure the AfDB complies with its own policies and procedures, during the design and implementation of its projects. It is an **independent body** that does not report to AfDB management. The IRM provides people adversely affected by AfDB projects an avenue to: submit their complaints in case of past, current or potential harm; hold the bank **accountable**; and demand access to remedy or a responsible withdrawal.

The IRM covers all AfDB-financed operations (including via financial intermediaries) through its three main functions:

1. Problem-Solving (Mediation);
2. Compliance Review (Investigation);
3. Advisory Services (Internal Learning).

Check out the toolkit "Understanding the AfDB"



Meet one member of the AfDB CSOs Working Group: Mbole Veronique (Green Development Advocates | Cameroon)



Mbole Veronique is a young Cameroonian environmentalist, who advocates for the rights of Indigenous and local communities in Cameroon and the wider Congo Basin. A passionate lover of nature, she is deeply committed to strengthening her relationship with the environment, people, culture, and Mother Earth as a whole.

Her efforts center on **advancing the rights of local communities and Indigenous peoples** - especially those affected by large-scale infrastructure and forest conversion projects - through community support, training and capacity-building, and advocacy aimed at encouraging governments and private sector actors to respect and protect Indigenous rights.

She joined the dynamic team at **Green Development Advocates (GDA)**, Cameroon, in 2021.

At GDA, she has worked closely with communities impacted by the construction of the **Nachtigal Hydroelectric Dam** on the Sanaga River in Cameroon. This 1.05 billion euros project, located 65 km northeast of Yaoundé, is being developed by the Nachtigal Hydro Power Company with financial support from EDF, IFC, the Cameroonian government, Africa50 (an investment platform established by African governments and the African Development Bank) and STOA.

In 2022, Veronique was part of the GDA team that supported communities in submitting complaints to the Independent Accountability Mechanisms of several banks financing the project, including the AfDB.

The complaint process was successful, with Veronique also playing a key role in helping the communities select representatives and participate in an 18-month mediation process with the project company. Although an agreement was signed at the conclusion of the mediation in May 2024, community members continue to raise concerns about a lack of compensation for the dam's impacts.

Nevertheless, alongside the people of Nachtigal, Veronique and the other GDA team members remain hopeful that the implementation of the final agreement will benefit all stakeholders. They expect the project developers to avoid repeating past mistakes and to adhere to the safeguard standards required by the financiers.

While awaiting a satisfactory implementation of the agreement, Veronique has also been instrumental in empowering local women through their association. She has guided them in asserting their rights in relation to the project and in adopting sustainable farming practices and livelihood strategies such as agroecology, the preservation and transmission of Indigenous seeds, and other traditional practices.



Advocacy meetings with the AfDB

On 8 May 2025, the AfDB hosted its [CSO Forum](#) in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. It was a hybrid event with a limited number of CSOs invited to attend in-person while many others attended online. The AfDB CSO Working Group commends that AfDB for its efforts in organizing the forum however,

- It was unclear which criteria the Bank used to identify the CSOs to invite in person.
- Communication about the Forum was not timely, limiting opportunities for broader participation.
- The hybrid format was ineffective, as the one-day meeting proved challenging for those attending online given internet challenges and time differences.

Unlike other development banks (e.g., the World Bank, Asian Development Bank), the AfDB once again chose to host the Civil Society Forum as a separate event rather than integrating it into the Annual Meetings. As a result, many CSOs were unable to attend, having to choose between the Forum and the Annual Meetings. Engagement between CSOs and the Bank is essential, should be meaningful and inclusive. The AfDB should reinstate the CSO forum at the annual meetings based on practices set by peer institutions including the World Bank and Inter American Development Bank. This will encourage broader participation, and foster a more open and effective dialogue.

What's next

MAY

26-30: AfDB Annual Meeting in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

JUNE

5: World Environment Day (UNEP)

15: World Food Day

30: Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4)

Check also this [calendar](#) in the AfDB website for further events.



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)

[Subscribe to the newsletter and stay in touch!](#)

